

Whole Beast Rag
Issue 01: HUNGER
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First Words by Julia Bouwsma

When my body came out of my mother,
she pushed; I pushed; flesh tore.
It was no neat cut—tissue tangled purple
and later, even stitches would not hold—
swollen scar uncoiling, a silver nitrate snake
between her legs.

And yet my father's version omits all blood
and begins instead with a dream

he dreamed
when I was still
inside my mother that he
was in the middle of a vast, green field,
on his hands and knees, searching
for a four-leaf clover
so I could be born.

He searched for hours
before he found one. Then he woke up,
and I was still inside my mother.

He spent the whole next day searching
on his hands and knees, and right before it got dark—
right at dusk when it's hardest to see—he finally found one,
and that night I was born.

Fable birthed from the gap between these two when their bodies were as close
as two bodies can be,

that rupture was mine—*why did you steal it from me?*

Parable of Hands by Julia Bouwsma

Where his fingers grasped mine,
where his wrist curled sideways,

I came alive.

An expanse of paper gleamed
Like desert flattened sand—

letters bloomed thick lobes
surviving in spite of
(because of) the glare

the way tiny cactuses come
to their growing forms.

I drank water
and I memorized words
and I practiced all the turns

he desired my young limbs to learn.

I walked the desert with one shoe on

and one foot stayed soft
and one foot burned.

Arachne Spun by Julia Bouwsma

Because her father was a dyer,
because her mother was dead

and the wool always so thirsty,
no one told her any stories.

She learned on her
loom, in a room
all alone.

She was thin
as a distaff, in need
of something—

as if her fingers discovered
her fingers.

She wound and shaped.
She twisted the spindle. She reached
for more. She spun.

Everything she touched
transfigured
to long threads.

She plied the needle.
She plied her tongue.

Now all twelve watch

this girl—
her fingers are ready,
her story decided.

She splays the wings
of the swan just so.

Hand over hand,

hand blurring hand,

waves curl the ankles
she weaves. She wants,

wants so badly to tell,
she can't see

what she's become.

Shuttle-struck is
nothing but belly.

Little fingers cling,
little fingers become
the only work—

what is spun in the belly

what slips out of the mouth

and leaves her
belly spun

from the belly still spinning.



The Carnivore and the Vegetarian by Julia Bouwsma

I.

He is still at work. She is at home stalking the narrow light of their kitchen. She closes her eyes. When her feet stop moving it will be time to open them. She will raise her eyes carefully to clock on the wall. It will be time to start making his salad.

She starts with the lettuce, seizing the middle in one fist and tossing the outer leaves away with the other. Only the small leaves for him. The ones that are glistening and green. She tears them gently, rinses them, spins them dry.

A dull paring knife will rip a tomato's skin, will send the fruit bursting, trickling into the furrow between cuffed sleeve and watchband. She is not one to let her knives dull. She keeps them in a neat row in front of the stove, their sharp points shining downwards. But there is something about the feel of a tomato seed as it slides between her knuckles. And there is always one knife that she keeps in a drawer and cannot bring herself to sharpen.

Running a spoon along the inside of an avocado, she allows her finger to sweep the secret edge between rough and smooth. Just a quick press reminds her of the ridge of flesh between his upper lip and nose.

The cucumbers come last. Little sinister smiles. She always leaves the peels on, despite his complaints. It's the best part: watching him slide his teeth in a flash of perfect white arc.

II.

She never eats when he does. Instead she stares at him from across the wooden table. He has a dimple on his chin. It twitches when he chews. He eats slowly, deliberately. His eyes rarely leave his plate.

She watches him through a glass of wine. Burgundy shadows flickering, hand to mouth. Tonight there are artichokes before the salad, young frostbitten ones. She gives him two. She worries sometimes that he will grow thin. She gives him butter with lemon. She gives him mayonnaise with Worcestershire sauce and balsamic vinegar.

And she lights a cigarette while she watches. He runs his teeth coarsely through the outer leaves. She stares at the narrow ridges left from the cracks between his teeth. This is the only time she ever smokes.

He piles the scraped leaves on the table. The inner ones he bites in half. He scoops the thistles out of the center with the side of his fork. When he eats the heart it is with small bites and always in a circular motion.

She has trained herself to be still. She moves only her hands. Her cigarette from mouth to ashtray. Her glass of wine. It is not easy. Her finger keeps circling the rim. He has started the salad.

There is a tomato seed on his lip. She wants to get up. She wants to cross the room and bend her body over his. To cup his moving throat in her hands, kneading harshly at the tendon behind his jaw. To jerk away suddenly, the tomato seed in her own mouth.

But he flicks the seed with his tongue, dislodges a celery string from with a quick scoop of the thumbnail.

And then it is on to the cucumbers. And she is breathing between her front teeth, hands folded behind her back.

III.

When she sleeps it is with one hand pressed between his thighs, fingers stretched in a perfect octave over his scars.

The largest scar the same color as her nipple.

Like a giant grain of orzo, he tells her. He is stretched across the bed, kneading his toes through the sheet.

He tells her and she laughs. She does not say the shape is smooth and angular

like her right canine (longer than the left).

He has woken in the night to find it grazing his shoulder.

He has woken in the night and found her asleep, a slow smile twisting her lips.

In her dreams she circles a thigh, wrapping it, thickening it with long, pink strips of bacon.

So Many Seasons by Mark Brenden

An old man stood outside a roadside café that doubled as a pump station, breathing out heavy air that could've been smoke from his cigarette or late November biting his breath, making it visible. A cowboy stepped out of a yellow truck and stomped toward him, nodded. The old man put out his cigarette and opened the door for the cowboy, who again nodded.

A boy wearing a red coat and stocking cap came running from across the snow-covered asphalt: *HOLD THE DOOR, GENTLEMEN.*

Thank you, sir, boy it sure is a bearcat out there the man on the radio said he supposes we'll get two feet by noon I tell you what it's gonna be bearcat this winter. How are you doing? How's business? Shop holdin' up?

The man looked at him, nodded.

How's breakfast sound today? Boy I'm starvin'. Ain't got much to do today. Ma's sick as the devil. I suppose I oughta bring her back some soup. You got any soup?

The bell rung as the door closed and the man hung his coat and hat on the rack. He walked over to the cowboy who was sitting in a booth with his boot over the side and his back leaning against the wall. The cowboy pointed to something on the menu and handed it to the man, who nodded.

The boy sat down across from the cowboy, who was working on a toothpick. *How are you doing, partner? I see you got a snow blower in the back of your pickup. Ain't gonna touch nothin' today, are ya? I tell you what, the man on the radio said he didn't suppose it'd stop fallin' til Saturday.*

The man came over and set a coffee down in front of the cowboy.

Orange juice, please, the boy said. Tell ya what, the man on the radio this mornin' said that North Dakota is the drunkest state in America. I been up to Fargo last month, it was rowdy, sure, but I swear to ya it don't come close to Clark on a Saturday night. I told ma that I oughta call in and tell the man that. She's sick as a dog, I tell ya. Do you drink, sir?

The cowboy took a sip of his coffee.

Y'all sure are a coupla yappers. You got work to do today? I seen you got that snow blower in your truck bed. Don't waste your time, the man on the radio said ...

Boy, you mind shuttin' the hell up, the Cowboy growled, moving just his mouth as he stared at the table. I'm tryin' to drink coffee. The man on the goddamn radio don't know shit. Sooner you see that, the better.

The old man behind the counter turned around as quick as a pump station owner turns around on a Tuesday morning. He was writing up the cowboy's tab, but he stopped. The boy fastened the straps of his stocking cap, laid ten down on the table.

Can I get some soup to go, sir?

Snowflakes blew through the door as the boy went out, clutching the soup with one hand and covering it with the other. The man stared out at the twisting whiteness. *Yep*, he breathed, and walked to the kitchen to make some more soup.



Man Proof by James Cihlar

Color is in the air between us. Call it Spiritus Mundi
or the collective unconscious, it is the teal and salmon
of the upholstered headboard, the ivory of the sheers
around the four-poster bed, the Windsor blue
and Persian cream of my dressing gown's floral print.
I've been neither one thing nor another. The world you see
is not the world I live in. No silver balloon floating on a string
behind the white stripes of Venetian blinds.
For me it is primary red, an ache of the in-step,
Franchot Tone sweating under the lights.
I'm nothing but a nothing. Let's mock the barbarians in the ring.
No matter if they look like John Garfield and William Holden,
W.B. Yeats and C.G. Jung. Maybe someday I'll see my face up there.
Forgiveness is okay. I want the story to end before it becomes a story.
Hello, Mother. I'll wager I look great in a blonde wig.
You talk and I'll listen. Franchot Tone folds like a bad hand.
Tell the story backward and the balloon recedes behind a door.
My memory is your memory, my dreams are your dreams.
If I am standing on a cliff, you are on the other side. Goodbye, Mother.
It was a good fight, and the better man won. Anyone got a ducat?



August 1929 by James Cihlar

"I was their plaything and their idol, and something better—their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me."

—Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Living in the gut of a machine,
we are raised by invisible corporations.
The greatest good for the greatest number.
Who does the counting?
Today is the anniversary of the abandonment
of an American city, a bureaucracy of errors.
Lacking the confidence of the medium's familiar,
the ghost in training devotes herself instead
to a scientific study of evil.
Good luck. Using the sense of touch,
I want to find Miss Isabella's springer Fanny
lynched with a kerchief on the moors.
Victor gives life to his monster
but denies him the right to pursue happiness,
so the monster denies Victor both.
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold.
Evil is a face as familiar as Ingrid Bergman's,
the senator from Colorado told us.
Willa Cather can't help me here.
Take me to the Northwest Passage,
the illusory amplitude of white.

The Adult Season by James Cihlar

A Parkour court in Leicester
will reduce antisocial behavior
among young men.
The flabby third acts of American lives,
a cotillion of bloat, poor motility,
the easy. "A bore is starred,"
the *Village Voice* wrote of Streisand's
remake that I watch on the plane,
her four-octave range squandered.
With the collapse of Goldtrail Holidays,
the CAA wonders how to bring
stranded holidaymakers home.
Bjork bails out Iceland
whose bust wiped out Nottingham.
Not all chronology is decadence and science.
"Load every rift' . . . with ore," Keats told Shelley.
Yarn becomes a bow in a flash of hands,
butterfly bushes grow wild along the tube,
and swallows spiral and bank like hive mind.
No other physical challenge is as difficult
as holding a life in my ears.
A BBC Three program tells us that chronology
is more than the immaculate degeneration of our cells.
Depth of field is a corridor of stars,
and Clouds of Magellan shimmer
like Dame Edna's rhinestones, a basket
of Easter grass, excelsior, a cabinet of Swarovski
crystals at Harrods, the surfeit of light that absorbs us
as we walk across the ocean floor
from the island to the mainland at low tide.



Singleton by James Cihlar

An orphan from Canada, she can live, like me, only where the sky
is always gray, and the leaves hang windless in the yard.
The angled walls of her tiny rooms segment her flat into spaces
impossible for three people to fit, and yet there is always
something to do, *business*, the producer calls it:
feed the fish, pet the cat, peel potatoes, pour a cup of tea,
without missing a beat of dialogue. Gobsnacked on the hearth,
she lost her memory. A husband, an auntie, her name—
gone in one fell swoop. On charges, she was the talk of London.
She testified before the magistrates in powdered wigs.
A year in prison means nothing to her. Amnesia is something
we all can get behind, and love the woman convicted of sin.
Dilly intones pointedly, *Amnesia is not a type of madness*.
In pencil skirt and heels, Singleton runs like a schoolgirl
atop the stacked stone wall. She has made the leap from woman
to image of woman. She swings around the apple tree
like Eve around a maypole. She quotes the Bible to the Bishop
until he pronounces her sound of mind. This is how she escapes shame.
There is a fine line between annoyance and attraction.
How good to be a chimera, dancing on Joseph Cotton's feet,
in time to the music box, the porcelain figurines writ large
from outside the master suite by the lovers' silhouettes.
Her eyes are wild, her head jerks spastically, she is half a woman only,
with everything to learn all over. Singleton, Singleton, Singleton,
you prove it is possible to forget the past entirely. Like you,
I choose to lose my memory. What I can't remember I can't forget,
and what I can't forget I can't remember.

In Which You Consider Going to the Grocery Store by Amy Collier

Noon has fallen into recline
Like a lazy metropolis
Upon boughs and crumbling moss-coated roofs.
Its yawn simmers in your chest.
Oh how will you cook that eggplant parmesan
When you are moss-coated
And leaning like a slanted roof?
When your irises have grayed out like skies?
You won't be able to see the redness
In the tomatoes of the vegetable aisle
Or the bright blue of your debit card
Its dull guillotine sheen
Your neck over the register.
The bus's head beams cut through your fog
Like a lighthouse on a fluorescent shore.
You will yawn and spin the wheel seaward,
A slow gradient into night.



Ingredients by James Collector

REMIXED DAILY, COMPOSITION SUBJECT TO OBJECTIVE INFLUENCE:
MIGHT BE THE CHEMICALS, MIGHT BE THE STARS. PROBABLY THE UPBRING.
AT LEAST NOT JUST IN MIND, MY MIND.
MADE UP MAKE-SHIFT RATIO FOR SAKE OF STUDY. DIET OBSERVED DAILY.
RITUALS RE-EXAMINED.
EVIDENCE: INCONCLUSIVE, ONGOING.
TO EXPLAIN THE TWILIGHT IN MY EYES,
I LACQUERED THE CATARACT OVERHEAD, BEGIN PURGING UPON THE PAGE—
TO BALANCE OUT THE INTAKE.
YOU SEE, I SAW ANGELS FED EXQUISITE SLOP FROM HEIRLOOM TROUGHS.
DESPERATE & SLOSHED WITH COAGULANT, THEY BECAME THE BEST PRETENDERS,
TIPPED THEIR TITANIUM DIOXIDE HALOS AT AMIABLE ENTITIES ACROSS FORMICA ISLANDS. BUT BEHAVED
DIFFERENTLY IN THE DINING ROOM.
VERY LITTLE TO SAY TO EACH OTHER.
AFTER GRACE I WATCHED THEM WOLF DOWN THEIR RIBOFLAVIN FEELINGS.
MIND-READERS DIGESTING FERROUS SULFATE WITH WEAK STOMACHS.
AT SOME POINT, I MUST HAVE DEVELOPED THE DISORDER TO DEAL.
PROGNOSIS: PROACTIVE IMAGINATION. SIDE EFFECTS: HYPERAWARENESS
UPON RE-ENTRY INTO PRESENCE OF OTHERS. COULD NOT LOOK AWAY
FROM WHAT THEY WERE: MORE THAN WHAT THEY ATE.
SO BEAUTIFUL DESPITE INDOCTRINATION.
HYALOPTEROUS AFLUTTER UNABLE TO ELEVATE HOST BODY BAGS OF BONES
ABOVE THE FACTICITIES OF THEIR MORTAL MAKE-UPS.
KIND, FUN-LOVING CREATURES REALLY
EVEN WITH THIAMINE NITRATE IN THEIR FLUSHED CHEEKS,
NIACINAMIDE WITHIN THEIR NAPES, PHENYLALANINE BEHIND THEIR SMILING EYES.
NONE TO BLAME.
I WAS MADE TO LOVE
THE PECTIN IN EVERY VERMICULATE WINDROW ON THEIR FINGER TIPS.
TO SEE THE UNEXPLORED RIDGELINES IN THEIR DEXTROSE JOWLS.
THE HINTS OF CARRAGEENAN IN THEIR LIPS BESPOKE SUNSET
TO MY ARTIFICIALLY ENHANCED NATURALISM,
I TOO
FOUND PYRIDOXINE HYDROCHLORIDE IN MY PROPYLENE GLYCOL AORTA, CARBOXYMETHYLCELLULOSE
IN MY CALLUSES.
OUR SORBITAN MONOSTEARATE COMPASSION HELD SHARED ELEMENTS TOGETHER, GROUNDED US
WHEN METABISULFATE SOLAR PLEXUSES SPOILED.
THOUGH OVER TIME GLYCEROL ESTER OF ROSIN DECAYED,

THE REALIZATION OF THOSE BONDS PRESERVED COMFORT.
WHAT CHOICE DID WE HAVE BUT TO SUBORDINATE OURSELVES TO OUR BELLIES?
AFTER ALL, WE FALLEN ANGELS WERE ENTRUSTED AN INTANGIBLE INGREDIENT
WITHOUT WHICH THE RECIPE FOR FORGIVENESS WOULD FAIL TO RISE
EVEN AT THE MERCY OF CHEMISTRY.



Apartment Pack by Ash Dazzle

I never shower the day I see her. She's got bedbugs and I'm told they slide off you if you're dirty. She told me the chinks brought them in and I reprimanded her, an elderly black woman, for using a racial slur. I can't be racist, she reasoned, I'm old and black. She told me she had bedbugs and I ran through all the times I stepped inside her apartment, the shithole. It looks like the spaghetti guy's apartment in the movie *Seven*. I asked if she wanted me to call the landlord and get a cleaning agency to come in. She was worried about the money. Each week I kept asking, and she turned me down each time, so after a while I stopped. I told her I couldn't go inside her apartment anymore. I also told her I couldn't drive her son—the morbidly obese diabetic who lives with her in that shitty, infested hole—to a tour of a new apartment because I didn't have clearance to transport anyone other than her. That was a lie. I couldn't drive him because he wouldn't fit into my car. Now I take pictures of the apartments we look at and show them to her son. His belly hangs out, heavy and low and I stand outside the entryway, scrolling through the photos. He complains about my bad photography and yells at me when I pack the grocery bags too heavy. He says it hurts his back to pick them up and I want to remind him they wouldn't be so heavy if he didn't eat so much. But I bite my tongue.

She has me drive her to a dirty meat market on the other side of town. Outside the market, a gangbanger in a wheelchair stops in front of me and offers me a ride. He whistles and spews aggressive sexual innuendo like, I'll break you in two. I look the other way and try not to bend over while I help her out of the car. I don't want him to get confused. She's supposed to walk with a cane but she can't carry it all for the dirty pleather bag and cigarette that she puts out in her hand, no spit, every time we walk into a store. I carry the cane and hold her arm. Once she fell out of her bed and cracked her ribs. She didn't go to the doctor; just double-dosed on her pain meds for a week and cancelled our appointments. I open the door for her and follow her to the counter, stuffing my hands into my pockets so I don't accidentally touch anything. She rings a dirty metal bell for service. The butcher comes out. He's wearing plastic gloves with holes in them. I can tell they're sweaty. He never takes them off as he opens freezer doors and peruses the spices, offering Lawry's salt. Tastes great on chicken, he says. She asks me to take it and look at the price. I try to locate the tag without touching it. He holds it out for me to take it and I tell him I can't. I remind her of her budget and she drops it. She gets the apartment pack for \$70. Four pounds each of various meats. She substitutes spicy sausage for skin-on bacon. On the wall, beef sirloin is spelled sirlon. She gets hocks and chicken feet. The butcher wraps everything in white paper and packs it all up into a sagging box and offers it to me to carry to the car. I ask if he could carry it out for me and hold the door for him with my elbow. I'm afraid to touch anything. While we're outside, he asks me if she's my mother. I laugh and tell him no, I'm her social worker. He nods and drops the box into the trunk of my car.

We go back inside and I find her at the register, shoveling cheap candy into a plastic bag. Chick-O-Sticks. Knockoff mini Tootsie Rolls. Mysterious spherical candies with no wrapping. She offers me one. I'm not supposed to take up clients' offers of food or drink unless refusing would negatively impact our working relationship. I think of this. I think of the butcher with the bloody gloves he never changed and shrug, no thanks. I'm not hungry. The cashier rings her up and she needs my help entering the pin of her EBT card after she swipes it. She remembers the two-liter soda free with any purchase. She points to the off-brand grape

soda and has me load it in the trunk, in the box with the meat. It's warm out and I'm worried the meat won't stay cool. I ask if she wants to swing by her apartment to drop it off. She shakes her head no. She says they'll eat it anyway.



A Devil of Infected Confetti by Matthew Dexter

We can hear the talk radio reverberating from Dad's open windows through the Rhododendrons two blocks away as he drives home from work. I know nothing of the numbers and names being mentioned. Dad is not a great man. He is not a bad man, but he is no hero. Last night he laid a trap for the stubborn raccoon that visits the backyard after school like clockwork. Orange and brown fur glowing beneath the cumulonimbus clouds, beatific creature sits on the patio furniture, more than willing to wait for one of us to open the door. It never attacks.

What the hell is it doing here? Dad asks Mom as she empties the merlot into his glass. Dad has been driving home early in order to ascertain the intentions of the animal. Mom licks the last cluster of salt from the blue rim of her frozen margarita and shakes her head. She pivots to check that the porch door is shut. Sometimes the animal rubs against the windows, scratching his body against the cold. Every day I toss some of the biodegradable crap that Mom expects me to eat for lunch onto the driveway: bologna and white bread slices, the green apple and purple grapes. I watch the magnificent creature gorging as it shakes its tail; then I drop the brown paper bag so the raccoon can lick it.

Our neighbor is a clinical psychiatrist with a batting cage. Everybody thinks the raccoon must be insane (after all, only a diseased animal would show itself during the daylight), but that man knows I am a lunatic. Though he may never show it or tell his wife, deep down inside he knows the psychological problems run deeper than a foaming, garbage-eating monster.

Who the hell sends their tween to a psychiatrist that participates in the car pool? Every other morning, I walk across their front lawn and knock on his kitchen door—watch him drinking steaming hazelnut coffee, eating peppered scrambled eggs, buttered toast, and blackened bacon—reading the *New York Times*. Beethoven blasts from the invisible speakers embedded in the ceiling. A large beagle humps my leg under the table. No thank you, I say to his offers for something to drink. No water. No orange juice.

One day after swimming his adopted son from China convinced me to strip naked and dance around his bedroom. Does the shrink know about that? Should the terrifying aroma of chlorine serve as an example of classical conditioning? Are awkward moments more than a shriveled Pavlovian appendage and a mountain of cold whipped cream on a tween's nipple? While the warm blood rushes between pimples and blackheads, dizziness welcomes white walls while the psychiatrist plays with his beagle in the backyard?

Dad loads his hunting rifle and aims at the raccoon. Mom turns on the blender—as if to drown out the shot. Mom sucks Jose Cuervo from the pump nozzle of the golden bottle. Dad has perfect aim. He has made his fortune zapping the sun damage from the faces and bodies of wealthy patrons that shell out a few hundred dollars every treatment. The VersaPulse C® Aesthetic Laser has made him a millionaire. Mom has had so many photo facials that she looks more like a teenager than a middle-aged alcoholic. Her face is flawless. The boys at school fantasize about sleepovers at our house. Sometimes, when I wake up in the middle of the night to pee, I find the tweens standing over Mom and Dad's king-sized bed, listening to them breathe.

Mom growls at the raccoon as Dad lights a Cuban cigar. I have already fed the majestic *Procyon lotor* all I had, but it waits for more. Dad aims the rifle as if targeting a cluster of broken capillaries and age spots. He pulls the trigger and a piece of roof crumbles onto the table, dust and plaster confetti covering his shoulders. My sister screams and Mom drops the hand-blown margarita glass on the Mexican tile while sprinting from the kitchen. Dad slams his kneecap on one of the legs of the table and stumbles up the staircase.

By the time I get to the top of the landing my sister is crawling, bleeding from her sneaker. Her sock is crimson. There is a hole in her shoe and Dad removes the Nike. There is a hole in her foot and another in the ceiling of her bedroom. Dad takes off his turquoise scrubs and applies the garment as a tourniquet. Mom calls 911 and we wait for the goddamn ambulance as the raccoon scratches against the patio umbrella. The animal climbs the gutter onto the roof and watches us through the window: my sister screaming, Dad cursing himself, Mom sobbing with her wrinkleless face.

The raccoon is licking the glass, its tail bouncing back and forth. Mom is punching Dad in the back of the head with an open fist. Why did you do that? Mom asks. How the hell could you do that? My sister is screaming as Dad picks her up to avoid Mom's kicks to the side of his skull. The raccoon follows us from window to window as we make our way back to the kitchen.

Go get help from one of the neighbors, Mom says. I sprint outside, the fantastic creature following me across the grass toward the psychiatrist's kitchen. The clinking from the batting cage grows louder. He is sitting inside the kitchen with his beagle. I can see him petting the benevolent creature through the panes of glass where my knuckles knock. He looks up, alarmed, as if half-expecting one of his crazy patients. He lets me in and the raccoon follows. The raccoon lunges toward the beagle, chews the ears and neck as if was a bologna sandwich. The psychiatrist grabs an aluminum baseball bat from his porch, begins swinging at the orange skull.

I grab the butcher knife, skinning myself until the shrink stops. The blood satisfies the raccoon and it drops the crippled beagle. I stab the neighbor in his lungs and the beast bathes in the doctor's veins. I walk across the street and swagger past the Rhodie through the front door like Don Mattingly. The ambulance is approaching. I grab the rifle and stick the barrel into my mouth. It tastes wonderful between my lips. It rattles against my teeth. I curl my little toe around the trigger. The raccoon sits on my lap as the pitching machine is spitting baseballs. They make contact with the aluminum bat, flying into the upper net where they drop down and roll out of sight. No more sleepovers for a while.

Spring Sing [Grade 5] by Sally Franson

You are sixty feet tall and on the top row of the choir risers and your head keeps bumping the spotlights onstage. They are blinding your eyes. You are the only girl back here; the others are in the front, porcelain and dainty, so small that the boys keep them in their pockets. There is no pocket big enough for you. You smooth down your jumper and suck in your tummy but still when you adjust your shoulders boys are sent flying. You can't help it; Mrs. Wasserman says that singers have to stand up straight. But you can hear Dan Boeannen grumbling as he climbs back on the risers. Fat Bitch, he whispers to Tom Coney, loud enough so you can hear. The tips of your giant ears turn red as Mrs. Wasserman clicks her pencil on the music stand, a signal that the concert is beginning.

Earlier that day, when you were getting ready, you stacked fifteen mirrors on top of each other and tried on all your cotton dresses and hated the way you looked in every single one. Even with two sports bras smashing them down your boobs looked too big. They're the size of boulders, and weigh as much. Eventually you gave up on the dresses and put on a baggy t-shirt and a crocheted vest that your grandma gave you. You thought maybe it looked cool, maybe a little different, but when you got to school all the girls were wearing polka-dot dresses with red scrunchies in their hair, and you forgot about wanting to be different and instead just felt ashamed.

You do not wear red scrunchies because Kelly told you on the tetherball court that red makes your zits look bigger. But you try not to think about your zits because now Mrs. Wasserman is playing "Mr. Sandman" on the piano. You are singing – you love to sing – but your voice is too loud and low and so you try to be quieter. You hunch your shoulders, which will help you sing quieter, and also might shave off a few feet from your enormous frame. Tom Pederson is the next tallest kid in class and he's only five-three. How big you must look compared to him. Moms and dads are taking video in the audience but your dad is at work and your mom doesn't like to take pictures of you because once she said that she had a boyfriend by the time she was eleven and that unless you lost a few pounds you probably never would.

Everyone claps when you finishing "Mr. Sandman" but you know, somehow, that they are not clapping for you. Your tummy rumbles and it shakes the floor as you take your bow; Dan falls off the risers and flips you the bird. You want to tell him it's not your fault. You are hungry because you've only eaten celery all day; you are hungry because no one cares if you eat celery all day; you are hungry because for the rest of your life you will be expected to eat celery all day, and you know that at some point it will ruin you.

When the concert is over, after your mother drives you back home, you carefully pour white chocolate chips into an ice cream bowl and take a bag of Gardettos down to the basement. You watch the episode of *Full House* that you taped on the VCR, and you tell yourself that someday you will look like Stephanie Tanner, and someday you will have a dog named Comet, and someday you will have three dads that love you, including one that is as cute as Uncle Jesse. You melt white chocolate chips on your tongue and hunt for the garlic

chips in the Gardettos and you think to yourself as you lick your fingers, Well at least, well at least, well at least I have this.



Four Questions in a Prose Poem by Daniel Hedges

When we die, will we spawn the metaphysical to infinity?
Will we return unto our homes as salmon, or choose
the right words when it matters? Will our return
resemble a reverse migration to an origin of
strength? Will time deliver our final
equalization payment?



Constant Elegy by Daniel Hedges

In the reviews, they spoke of how the words “evoked space”, and how the imagery “lit up the sky” with an “axe of courage.”

It was spoken as if the prose meant anything to anyone. No one mentioned how the “voice” tethered on a semantic totem of constant elegy.



No Reason at All by Daniel Hedges

Out amidst the orchard of choice, we dabble in requiems and font styles. We concentrate our thoughts until they become aluminum charms in semantic worlds, word-worlds away. We point to repetition as a charismatic device and alouette to the Mid-West for no reason at all. The grammarian sticklers peruse the catalogue of noise for new rituals of austere Julep and make is possible for agrammarian humanimals to rise up in ironic rapture.



Disco Balls and Semantics by Daniel Hedges

While we concede that disco balls have hundreds of facets (there is no standard) the great semantic conundrum has a panoply of facets that makes physics look like snakes and ladders.



This Epoch's Zeitgeist by Daniel Hedges

Neo-Cliché-Hipsters form neo-sermons to exhibit righteous progress in a context of this epoch's zeitgeist. Lemon juice dissolved in distilled mineral water a reasonable drug to carry this mentation forth.



Domesticity by Kevin Hedman

His favorite dish is a kind of beef casserole: macaroni, hamburger, tomato sauce and sliced-up hotdog all mixed together and baked. He dumps clots of grated cheese over it and then he swallows one heaping spoonful after another until his stomach turns. With his tongue colored bright orange, he finishes off a tall glass of milk and settles into the yielding cushions of his old recliner. Sometimes he's so satisfied his eyes flutter shut and he's asleep even before his wife takes away the TV tray. Other times he's too impatient and he burns himself with his first taste. Nothing in his life frustrates him as much as this. The flavor—or rather, the blend of flavors—that he loves above all others is wasted on his singed tongue and the meal, anticipated for hours beforehand, becomes a sullen and desultory affair. These are the nights, rare but always to be dreaded, when he will sit staring straight ahead, chewing joylessly and resenting the anchors on the evening news more than he usually does.

He eats it every Sunday. He can't imagine going without it. It helps him feel better about another long week at the company. Recently, he's taken to demanding it on Thursdays also and, if there's enough left over, he brings it downtown in a Tupperware bucket for Friday's lunch. He doesn't mind eating at his desk. He feels he gets more done that way: the whole office is entirely his for an hour and then some. A lot of the younger guys like to go out of one of the restaurants on the plaza then, but they seldom invite him and, when they try, he refuses with unnecessary vehemence. The food there costs too much, they give you too little of it, the tables are too close together and the conversation is either lewd or about things he has no interest in.

He prefers the places close to his subdivision. He and his wife are in the habit of choosing one of them each Tuesday night. They're hardly ever busy then and they never have to wait to sit down. With his back and her knees, this is no small consideration. Most of the high school age hostesses know them by now and they're almost always taken care of before he has to gripe. At the Mexican one, they even have regular seats right under the pig-in-a-sombrero piñata. His wife is more fond of the Mexican one than he is. She spoils her appetite with the chips and salsa and then orders the enchiladas grande regardless. Everything on the menu is too spicy for him except the chicken tacos and these tend to come to their table cold, rubbery, and with far too many vegetables crammed in. He goes home feeling unfulfilled, but he doesn't complain much anymore. He understands that it's part of being married, to act like he enjoys things he actually doesn't.

If it were left up to him, each week he would pick the steakhouse further along the frontage road. Their prime rib platter strikes him as righteous in its deliciousness and it comes with unlimited baskets of fresh bread and any three side items. He orders this exclusively now—he hasn't had to look at the menu for a year and a half. His only concern is finding an appropriate balance between the entree and the extras. He feels reasonably confident that the down-south seasoned fries, a cup of old-country chili, and the baked potato with all the fixings is the ideal combination, but a reckless part of him can't help pining for the breaded shrimp or the hot cheddar poppers or even the buffalo wings with hearty ranch dipping sauce. In the moments after he makes up his mind, he tends to worry that he has misjudged his own desires and condemned himself to less happiness than he deserves. He wishes then that his wife would just once relent and ask for one of the cattleman's deluxe specials so that he could poach a wider variety of sides for himself. Their conversation

becomes strained as he fidgets with his straw, covetously eyeing each sizzling slab of meat carried out of the kitchen until the food finally comes and once again soothes him with its great abundance.

There is also—although he doesn't know it and wouldn't admit it if he did—an intangible element in the ersatz wild-west decor that appeals to him. Steer-horn chandeliers and sepia-toned photographs of broad-shouldered men with ornate mustaches, plastic cactuses and piles of fresh sawdust on the floor: he feels comfortable among such things. For an excuse to linger, he orders dessert every now and then. When he does this, his wife will check her watch and remind him of the shows they're missing. If her mood is foul, she might even make a point of bringing up his cholesterol problem. She does this because she suspects he has an eye for the waitresses in their half-unbuttoned plaid shirts and skimpy denim shorts. She isn't jealous, of course. At her age, one either recognizes jealousy as vain and silly or they suffer it every minute of the day and she hasn't gotten to where she is by being a fool. She feels a responsibility, however, to keep him from embarrassing them both with his indiscreet staring, his half-dozen drink refills and the bad jokes he tells in such a loud voice.

Under any other circumstances, she is happy to let him eat for as long as he likes. She grew up on a farm and there she learned that the worst struggles come when the foal loses the will to feed itself. She is scrupulous in buying his snacks. At the supermarket, the checkout lady once took a look at all the economy-sized packages crowded onto the conveyor belt and told her that she must have a big, big family. She chuckled because she couldn't help it, but underneath she wondered what business it was of hers. The longer she thought of it, the more rude it seemed. She should have talked to the manager. It was the height of summer, though, and her six cartons of ice cream were already melting. The world is overrun with insensitive people, she believes, and it won't be long before the kind and decent ones are outnumbered. She goes to a different grocery store now. It's further away and more expensive, but the aisles are wider and the clerks there don't speak enough English to be insulting.

She jokes that she gets enough exercise for the week just by pushing the cart and carrying the sacks. Her three-year-old four-by-four handles differently under their weight and the ballast they provide is a comfort to her when the roads are slippery. She wishes that her kitchen was bigger, though; she has to throw out things that aren't even close to spoiling to make room for her new purchases. The pantry doors don't shut all the way for all the cracker boxes and potato chip bags stuffed behind them. The compartments of their refrigerator overflow with value-packs of peppered beef sticks and pudding cups. For a half-decade now, they've had no space left for their soda cases and so they've been keeping them in the garage. He grouches about how far it is to walk, but she can't see any other way. He's dead set against buying a bigger one.

When they have fights, they're always about matters like these. The stove gives out, the dishwasher dies, or the microwave begins to scorch everything and he can't be bothered. There are holes in the wall that have been gouged by the edge of his easy chair. There are places on the carpet where the old stains have been discolored by new ones. In the summer, the air conditioner makes a constant clicking noise and in the winter the heat smells strange. He pretends he doesn't notice until she points it out and then he pretends it doesn't matter. It wears on her patience. If she presses him, it is in his most impassioned voice that he sets her straight. He says—invariably—that it's been brutal at work and he can't bear the thought of coming home to more things

going wrong. He needs his time to unwind. He has to have a few hours each day without people picking at him. The hardware store is close by and as big as an airplane hangar, but he loathes going there. He fills with dread at the very thought of talking to those eager-eyed kids in the orange vests. He knows his incompetence is obvious to every one of them, and when he leaves it's with his vanity in tatters. The leak in the ceiling or the dead mouse in the dryer can wait, he tells her. He'll get around to it soon, he promises, but it takes him forever and usually she gives up and does whatever needs to be done by herself.

She doesn't hold it against him anymore. She's known him since they were both eighteen and, in all that time, she's come to love him unreservedly. She can't imagine a night without him there. Sometimes, for days on end, she won't have a single conversation with anyone but him and she never even notices. She considers herself lucky; she found a regular, decent husband and so many women don't. She reminds herself of that whenever she loses control and scolds him over some unreasonable whim of hers. The wounded look that spreads across his wide, open face can smother the worst anger she's capable of. Guilt comes over her easily and, to make amends for her unjust emotions, she makes him a three-scoop fudge sundae. He doesn't care much for chocolate, but he's never told her that. He eats it to be gracious in victory and because he recognizes it as the ritual she has to perform before she can stop complaining. She waits in the kitchen, half-heartedly washing something until she hears him howling at the television again. This is what calms her at last. She believes she can tell his mental state from the timbre of his laugh.

There is a certain kind of show he enjoys. He rails against the reality programming and all the dramas about doctors or lawyers or skinny girls who solve murders he finds pompous and dull. Instead, he watches sitcoms, but even most of these he considers unworthy of his attention. He can't abide cute children or smartly-dressed single people and he's lost any affection he once had for large, zany families with gruff-but-kindhearted patriarchs. Now he searches out the ones set in cheaply-decorated offices, the ones starring secretaries with hairstyles he recognizes from his younger days and their bald, bellowing bosses. Not many of these are being made nowadays and he takes this as perhaps the most telling evidence of society's relentless decline. It's a shame and it would be an outrage if the old, cancelled ones weren't so plentiful in syndication and on cable. In whichever era, there's always a wisecracker in them and that's who he looks up to, even if they're gay. That one with the pink shirts and the wild ties is the best one. When that little queer gets going, he roars until he's out of breath and really crying. That guy is as funny as they come.

He tries to assume a similar role at his own workplace. Rarely is there an opportunity for sarcasm that he doesn't exploit to the fullest; precious few are the absurdities that he has yet to mine for comic potential. His colleagues have come to expect this and, for the most part, they avoid him. Now he has to seek them out to tell them about the latest ridiculous memo he's received, the current nonsense coming from the human resources department. He finds the richest material in the cheap equipment they're supposed to make do with. He has a well-oiled routine about the toxic swill the coffee-maker churns out and another about how the photocopier is jammed ninety-seven-point-nine percent of the time. For the benefit of those who have heard all of this many times before, he's moved on to casting aspersions on the snack machine. He points out how everything in it is low fat nowadays, leaving only one kind of mustard-flavored pretzel in there that a proud man can be caught eating. Even though it isn't true, he goes on at length about how whenever he puts his money in

and pushes the button for that one, the bag always gets stuck between the glass and the mechanical shelves. He throws up his hands in feigned dismay and comes to the climax with one of two carefully-considered punch lines. The first is that he's considering a lawsuit and the second is that his wife must have tampered with it somehow. As he basks in the laughter he claims as his daily due, he occasionally wonders why they don't make a sitcom out of his life. There's more than enough there.

He can imagine a running gag about the fast food joints on the street below. He has become mindful about packing leftovers and microwavable meals largely because he's afraid to go to these places at lunchtime. From ten thirty straight on until three in the afternoon the lines can reach all the way to the sidewalk outside and, with his vertebrae the way they are, he simply can't stand for that long. In his mind, the situation is made even more ghastly by the fact that the people working there come from other countries. Under the best of circumstances, he's against immigrants, but when he's hungry and in pain this distaste blossoms into out-and-out hostility. He is not above rolling his eyes at them. He does not find it unreasonable to dump his money onto the grimy counter and demand that they do the same with his change. He can't keep himself from mumbling disparaging comments as he grabs his grease-stained sack and storms out. He knows they can't understand him and—every once in a while—he knows he's being unkind, but he has always found it difficult to treat strangers with respect when his belly is empty. It does not occur to him that this might get in the way of him becoming a likeable television character.

He is aware, however, that this sort of dining is bad for him and he's better off without it. He's been lectured by no less than nine doctors and the reports in the news and in the magazines his wife leaves scattered around the house have grown so numerous he can no longer block them out entirely. He knows about the national epidemic of obesity and he knows that high blood pressure is a silent killer. He even knows his ideal body weight, although he's mistaken in his belief that he surpasses it by only a hundred pounds. He understands why he wheezes after climbing up a single flight of stairs and why many of his morning trips to the toilet are disappointing. That none of this is a mystery doesn't keep him from slipping down when his workday is done to buy a package of fries or an apple turnover for the drive home. He reconciles himself to the Somalians and Ethiopians and whatever else they are then. The lines are short and he's found that he can be much more polite when he doesn't have to go right back to his desk. He wouldn't do it if traffic wasn't so awful, he tells himself: he could starve to death stuck among the taillights on the interstate. It's true, however, that he usually finishes what he's bought before he pulls out of the parking ramp, but this tides him over until supper well enough.

In a sense, that meal begins the moment he steps through his door and ends only when he brushes his teeth before going to bed. Chewing on the hard candies his wife keeps in a basket on the mantel, he tells her about his day in as few words as possible. He shrugs off whatever questions she might ask and settles in for the night. He changes the channel on the TV set and turns up the volume until he can hear it in every room of the house, a precaution which is hardly necessary, given that it would be unusual for him to move from his spot for any length of time. They don't eat in the dining room anymore. She sits on the couch, as close to him as she can get, in the place where the upholstery still bears the marks of when she wasn't as skilled at feeding herself amidst the many distractions of the den. She doesn't mind going back and forth to get him more. She isn't

interested in the things he watches anyway. Their talks are as good as ever during the commercial breaks and the shows he doesn't like as much.

He doesn't like to be rushed and so it can take him most of prime time to finish. More often than not, she has to reheat his second helping for him. After he's all done, he lets it settle by unfastening his pants and belching every third minute. An hour or so is all it takes, however, before he's ravenous for a treat and if she doesn't cut him a serving of strawberry shortcake or pumpkin pie right then, he'll go into the kitchen himself and come back with a portion so big it'll make him sick. If nothing is in season, he's just as happy with a heap of lime gelatin or a tin of cookies from the gas station down the street. He doesn't need much to be at ease and, knowing that, she can't keep from smiling beside him in the blue-grey darkness. The glow of the television catches in his eyes and they sparkle as he shakes with delight over the latest laugh-tracked cutting remark. Even covered in crumbs and with whipped cream on his lips, he is everything she ever wanted.

She always feels very tender toward him when she brings him his pills and a can of soda to wash them down with. He takes four: one is for his heartburn, another is to lower his cholesterol, the third stops his back from aching in the night, and the last keeps his prostate under control. She drops them into his outstretched palm and he swallows them with a great gulp, his adam's apple lunging below the folds of his throat. He rises soon after and goes shuffling stiffly into the bathroom. While he's busy in there, she turns off the television and straightens the things he has left in disarray. She has already put on her pyjamas and changed her estrogen patch. She likes to be beneath the covers before he comes waddling in, wearing only his underpants. It isn't easy for him to find a comfortable position and the rocking of their bedframe as he tries lulls her to sleep most nights. She discovered more than a decade ago that it's best if she drifts off before he starts to snore.

There are times when he makes so much racket she wakes up in the middle of the night. It sounds like his tongue is going through a terrible ordeal and she is often amazed that anyone could blithely dream through such a violent din. An elbow to the side and he'll stop, but only for a moment, only for as long as it takes to collect enough breath and spit for another eruption. She feels selfish if she has to prod him over and over, especially since he's looked so haggard recently, but there are nights when she can't help it. There are nights also when it does no good and she just lays there, watching the luminous red numbers on their alarm clock change. When her endurance runs out, she frees herself from the tangled sheets and slips out of the room, shutting the door softly behind her. She floats down the stairs and feels her way along hallway into the kitchen. She doesn't switch on any lights; the glow from the refrigerator is enough as she takes out her milk. With its door hanging wide open, she finds a bowl, a spoon, and her cocoa marshmallow cereal. She brings them all into the family room and there she stares at the television with the sound down low, her midnight snack steadily disappearing into her mouth through no conscious effort of her own.

What she sees then leaves almost no impression on her. Ancient reruns and excitable men with moneymaking schemes, she barely notices them. She slurps the sugary milk and rocks in his easy chair. At times like these, thoughts come to her uncluttered and subtly. She is aware of the soreness in her legs and the endless ringing in her ears, but they don't bother her now. She can remember when they weren't there and, when it's this late, she feels none of the longing for the younger, healthier her that occasionally arises in the waking hours of the

day. She is at her most practical in this state. She plans her tomorrows. She decides what she needs to clean and what she needs to buy and the proper order to do it all in. There, deep in the gently humming house, she assures herself that everything will happen much like it has always happened. When the milk is gone and her eyes have to fight to stay open, she returns to him.

She goes up the stairs and into their bedroom. She starts to hear him when she's halfway there and, by the time she pushes through the door, her nerves are again impervious to the noise. She stands over him as the sound rushes from his gaping mouth to fill the little space they share, strained and damp and gasping. She smooths his thinning hair and brushes her lips over his forehead. He has his own troubles at night, she thinks, and so she isn't angry when she notices he's rolled over and left no room for her beside him. She sighs and her fingers trace a path over his face. His snoring falls out of rhythm and she, without bitterness, gathers up her pillow and the spare blankets and lays a place for herself on the carpet beneath him. By now, she can't imagine being anyplace else. By now, she's tired enough to sleep anywhere.

Film Your Daughters! by Joey Gerard Heinen

Here's one for you: A teenage girl, as bored and buxom as she is naively powerful, learns some big things about the world as soon as she drops her drawers. We watch as she bounces between the furtive and ultimately unsatisfying gropes of her gangly peers, the boys, and the arrogant talky foreplay of those smoldering and predatory goons, the men. Her matriarchs look on with worldly disdain and disapproval (or jealousy) while she discovers the strangely satisfying allure of short skirts. A few wrong turns and a swift feeling of post-coital disillusionment, and suddenly we feel we've grown with this girl-woman. Why do I find myself so mentally turned-on?

I'm a gay man who watches a lot of movies about sex. Teen sex. And typically teen sex movies with fields of ripe female forms. I ask myself why I am attracted to this narrative just as much as I wonder about my continuing fascination with bosoms. I say this with a big heaping of self-awareness, knowing that gay men are still men and often get away with saying and doing just as much as their reductive straight counterparts. Ultimately I realized that I had no business trying to please a woman and embraced who I fully was. After having relished in gay sex for the last five years, I have looked back upon my own teenage years and learned something: I wish I was having sex as a teenager. I was even acutely aware of this in my teenage years, but how could a budding stink-bug of a boy ever expect to have sex with someone when he doesn't even know how to look another boy in the eye let alone confidently navigate a porn site. I even delighted in the occasional girl fantasy, but the thought of sexualizing my legions of close female friends was even more loaded and ultimately terrifying (I still have stress dreams about my past prom dates). So instead I watched movies. And in a way, it helped me to cope with the boredom and discontent.

But the habit persists. Perhaps I am embracing the dirty bird that I will one day become, but I have been watching more teenage "coming of age" (I'd call it "art soft-core") than ever, and it's progressively resembling my real sex life less and less. It wasn't until recently that I started to think critically about my filmic desire for gazing at teenagers, and specifically females. I also made the discovery that of all areas of the world, no one does it better than the French. The ultimate combination of elitist intellectual and trashy laissez-faire exploits, the French—by virtue of their films—love to look (or should I say leer) at beautiful teenage girls. I could give a litany of prime examples, but my two favorites are *Claire's Knee* (1970) and *A Nos Amours* (1983). Both are naturally made by straight "brainy" men (Eric Rohmer and Maurice Pialat respectively), primarily focus on precocious and irresistible girls at the cusp of their development, tackle some heavy daddy issues (fathers are either completely absent or vagrant nuisances), and observe the tremors of anxiety felt in an adult world that cannot contain such explosive creatures as these alluring daughters.

The films ultimately have very different kinks, though. *Claire's Knee* tells the story of Gerome, a middle-aged brown-haired silver fox who is vacationing along Lake Annecy before moving permanently to Sweden to live with his fiancée. He bumps into old friend and possibly fuck buddy, Aurora, who is also on vacation and staying with a family on the same lake. While visiting Aurora, Gerome meets Laura, the teenage girl who also lives at the house with her mother. Laura develops an instant crush on Gerome with his burly beardo yet sweet daddish demeanor and is not shy about showing it. No Rohmer film is complete without leisure class

vacations, an obscene amount of talk with little action, and of course outside meddling forces who delight in watching others make fools of themselves in their pursuit of sex. The sexual tension between Gerome and Aurora manifests in the form of veiled conversations about desire. Aurora being a writer, they both talk about potential juicy subjects for fictional stories that vaguely resemble reality. Gerome pretends to have no interest in young Laura but develops an intimate relationship with her. We discover that Laura is actually infinitely more intelligent and aware than her superiors would like to admit and surprisingly rejects Gerome's eventual advances knowing full well what he is up to.

The plot further thickens when Laura's half-sister, Claire, enters the picture. A less forthcoming and formidable subject, Claire is consumed with her himbo boyfriend in tight denim cut-offs (Rohmer throws a bone to us gays) and is more opaque than her curious half-sister. Claire is, nonetheless, beautiful in the way that we expect teenage girls to be: skinny, pert, delicate. Suddenly, Gerome shifts his attention to Claire and, namely, one specific part of her anatomy—her knee. Together, Aurora and Gerome hatch a narrative experiment in which Gerome will “have” Claire in the gesture of a consensual knee rub. Talk about the perversion of postmodern sexuality! Rohmer characters never get off in conventional ways, and it's anyone's guess as to whether his characters will ever get off because of their convoluted fetishes.

Sex is fairly straightforward and more typically pathologized in *A Nos Amours*. This film is all about the sixteen-year-old volcano that is Sandrine Bonnaire in her first screen role as Suzanne. There may not be a more auspicious teenager on film than Sandrine Bonnaire. Her hair is still in tomboy snarls and she has yet to outgrow her chipmunk-cheek smile, but baby girl is certainly growing. We see a lot of Suzanne, but we also see the blossoming of a powerhouse persona for which her world is not prepared. Summer theater camp has come to a close and Suzanne just can't follow through with screwing her sweet and cherubic boyfriend Robert. Instead, she hits up the local bar in her striped one-strap tube dress and picks up a sailor boy. What follows is several years of exploration of her sexual partners all the while chronicling the troubles at home after her father moves out. This primarily observational yet didactic film presents defining moments in the developing sexuality of Suzanne, some sexy, some very much not.

We listen to her pillow talk with her countless boy toys about how she seeks solace in men. However, she can't allow herself to fall in love with a boy as she instinctually thinks about whether her father would like them before rejecting the boy out of loyalty to pops. But daddy has fled the coop and left a mess at home. Big brother has assumed the role of man-of-the-house and demonstrates a rather volatile Napoleonic complex. Not only that, but he seems all a little too bothered (perhaps “hot and bothered”) by the sexual attention that Suzanne offers to other boys. Mother is demonstrating a mild personality disorder, flying in rages when she is confronted by Suzanne about her missing dress (said striped one-strap). Perhaps the most interesting twist to this story is that Daddy is played by Maurice Pialat, director and Daddy of the film itself. Pialat makes a rather risky social critique that is nonetheless worth considering. What causes one to live promiscuously? And why do we only care if it's girls? *A Nos Amours* seems to be saying that precociously powerful girls who also happen to be hotties run a large risk of being run over, particularly by men. How can a girl learn about the ways of men at the same pace as she is learning about being a woman? Where can she turn when that prime

living example has left home? These can be fairly reductive questions that assume a lot about what girls need—and this is not boys.

To further grapple with this francophilic gender identity theory, I'd like to turn to my favorite bad girl of French Second-Wave Feminism: Elisabeth Badinter. Daughter to an advertising mogul and wife to a former French Minister of Justice, Badinter is most famous for some rather inflammatory statements on womanhood. Her claims include the maternal instinct to be nothing but a sham and the condemnation of breastfeeding to be damaging to the development of the psyche. My favorite moment in Badinter's career came when she delivered a lecture at Princeton University in the early 1990s. Badinter claimed that the audience was already prepared to tear her apart and misinterpreted a lot of what she was trying to say. But according to scholar Joan Scott, she was arguing "banal things about how the French were sexier than Americans, better at sex, how American women washed too much, how they were embarrassed by their bodily odors, by oral sex." This is not to throw any shade on Badinter as a woman, for she certainly knows a great deal more on the subject than me. But I am absolutely fascinated by the implications of that statement (whether inaccurately quoted or not). True, I think that confident sexuality is essential to a modern, urban state of mind, but do people need to take power through sexuality? Is that the best way for women to come out on top? Did I also mention that she is close friends with Dominique Strauss-Kahn, nanny-screwed extraordinaire? You have to wonder what type of sex she's talking about and/or is accustomed to.

These are the thoughts that tempt me while I watch. I create vaguely intellectual distractions perhaps as a knee jerk reaction, fearing that my celluloid joy of looking is simply part of a subconscious act of ownership. Maybe I am looking back upon a time where I was made to feel desire for girls where I felt none, or at least felt vastly incompetent. Now, maybe I look at girls and enjoy it because it feels natural. But ultimately what I think is so great about these films is that girls are imagined as powerful beyond control; powerful because they put people into a place of sexual subjugation. Powerful in ways that I want to be now, and enough to perhaps force me out of homo-normative desire. Which is awesome.

And complicated. Because as Badinter demonstrates, the culture of powerful women vis-à-vis their sex brings us back to square one, where women can only get ahead by being sex objects. The eternal struggle is whether one can be a sexual object while also being the aggressor. Ultimately, women will probably always mature earlier and more "gracefully" than men, so it is natural for us to look at teenage girls curiously and carefully. Perhaps I'm just justifying an appetite that has become so superfluous that it is almost impossible to erase. Plus, of course I'd love to see more flicks about beautiful budding boys. But we're a long way from having that be okay for a broader audience. I for one deeply hope that the future will show more women telling this story for themselves and perhaps even forcing us to look at boys in the same way. Hopefully this story's inevitable and continued prominence in popular culture will force us to look at teen sex as something more than just kink but as a mirror on the sexual malaise that we carry into adulthood. Either way, there's no harm in looking, right?

Profile of Featured Musical Artist Randall Holt by Katharine Hargreaves

Anisovaya is an anise-flavored vodka out of Russia. It was also the AIM pseudonym of one Randall Holt, a boy from Albuquerque who had decided to become my friend after discovering my adolescent livejournal. It was sometime around 2002 that we began to talk, often at night over the internet, about the things we were reading and thinking.

Although we have been friends for going on ten years, Randall and I have only met once in person. For the last four or five we've mailed back and forth a ratty striped notebook full of letters and musings, ash-dusted and stained, with tight scrawls barely a scratch (Randall) or in an edging hand (mine). Throughout it all we've pondered the spectacular unfolding of our friendship while in the midst of making it. The spun stories of our mouths knit from the silk thread of our lives.

What I mean to say is that friendship, like all necessary things, is an art form in and of itself. A deliberate act that informs our lives, deepening them and asking—constantly asking—who we are, what defines us, and what it is we are willing to give. The bits and pieces of lives exchanged in that restless way. Sometimes lonely words fill the void. Through death and addiction, displacement and disintegration, we have born witness to the vast spill of life. And through this wreckage witnessed beauty.

This is what brings us together on a sun spattered day as we sit down to a phone chat. The thought that strikes me the most throughout our conversation is the funny way life has of throwing the right people your way. All you have to do is welcome them in. Earlier in the week Randall had called me to share news that could well change his life.

For most working artists, the adage "It's not what you know it's who" calls forth a certain cynicism. We loathe the idea that hard-work is not always rewarded or worse, that the ones who don't deserve it will reap more. Reframing the idea however reveals a real truth; which is that we are only who we are because of the those who have passed through our lives. That anyone makes it to the top alone seems some insidious myth.

I say all this because when we talk about art's contribution to culture it's important to acknowledge that this is not ever a solo endeavor. We create art to explain our selves to one another and to prove we are not alone. There are artists who understand and embody the essence of community in their creative endeavors. Randall I count among them.

A classically-trained cellist who honed his chops in the desert, Randall Holt was an experimental musician well-before I knew him. Like many creative folk I know, he has had numerous artistic reincarnations in various groups in and around the Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Austin arenas. He's been a co-conspirator of Adam Glasseye as part of Reverend Glasseye (out of Boston), was recently on the same bill as A Silver Mt. Zion, and has had a well-received solo project, RANDALL.HOLT:DEAD.CAT.CELLO, since 2009. Although our conversation is about his new band KNEST it takes us awhile to get there, for although we are good friends, there is much I have not heard about his art in awhile. I tell Randall to start at the beginning and fill me in.

"It's kind of an interesting story," he says. "Couple years back, about seven or so, I was living with my girlfriend and was way young and stupid. At the time I was trying to think of a band name for my solo thing and she had a spiritual experience once while looking at my cello. She said there was a cat in it. A couple of my friends saw it as well, and so it became my name."

Haunted or not, the image is fitting for the sounds that emerge from his cello's belly. Sonorous, slumbering mews, the curled lick of screams, an edge of noise to raise the fur on one's arms; all looped live and built layer by layer before you. Aching at some points and growling at others these are the sounds we can't give voice to: this ephemeral emotional void. To be dramatic: the music of life and death filtered through one man's hands. I am hardly exaggerating. When asked about the names (so much like poems) the album's emotional arc is revealed. Self-titled and comprised of what he calls "ten half-songs," this music was mostly written for dead friends of Randall's. "I had a lot of friends die in 2008," he explains, "So this album is basically an exploration of me dealing with all the emotions coming out of my cello and processing them through song. The album is kind of dark and a little sad but it's also got a lot of beauty in it."

"But doesn't sadness give birth to another side of beauty?" I ask. "If it's there in all its forms we shouldn't just celebrate the easy sides that make us feel good." It's not that I believe sadness is worth more in art, but it does have a certain weight. It is no secret that sadness gives shape and form to feelings we'd rather not feel. Yet the whole point of emotions is not to escape them.

"Exactly," Randall agrees. "And my main thought about the music I play is that I don't play sad music to make people feel sad. I want people to realize they are, and do something about it."

This distinction is important. Listening to the DEAD.CAT.CELLO album I am struck not by despair but rather the understanding of what this emotion signals; a sense of both loneliness and lightness. Two sides, perhaps, of love's coin. The track "Miseries Optional/All Does Not End" speaks to me of both as well as the existential choice left in the wake of much death. Expressions of grief are meant to question the meaning of the word alive. The people these songs contain, evoke, embody are no longer their physical selves, yet each is again alive every time someone hits play.

The function of grief is a one-way street: to purge this burden (the shadow of love's light) we must be present to the pain, but how? While making the album Randall remembers going to the grocery store and "seeing all these deadpan faces. I was there with a smile, about to cook food with friends, and everyone around me looked really sad. In the grocery store, in the bookstore, in public. Everywhere we have to wait in line." Which is everywhere, I point out. He explains "that's why my music is not about furthering this making people sad but exposing it." Or in other words, waking up to it. Because once you acknowledge the pain can it begin to transform and go away.

There are some songs we don't talk about, such as the one for Skye, the girlfriend back in Albuquerque Randall didn't get to say good-bye to. I ask instead about the song "New Movements, Like Glaciers", one of the only songs on the album with words. A writer without the means to make sound, I am immediately drawn to their stark imprint on the music and curious about their making. Rendering the finite on the infinite, that sort of thing. If all the songs contain stories, where do the words fit? And why these?

Randall explains how that song is not about "a close personal friend [as the others on the album] but a fellow named Vic Chestnutt." What follows is quite the web of events that have shaped his life in their aftermath. For starters, it was the very last show before Vic died of a drug overdose. It was December 16th, 2009 and Vic was playing Austin along with several backing members of Godspeed You, Black Emperor! and A Silver Mt. Zion. Randall describes in detail how "before Vic played he was introduced by a fellow who looks like a very large, homeless Santa Claus. With a big white beard and trucker hat. He's now one of my close friends." This man I come to find out, is Thax Douglas, self-proclaimed (and semi-famous) rock poet who has introduced a slew of musical greats and indie favorites. "He was living in Austin at the time. What he does is write poems for bands. He gets us onstage and introduces us with poems written explicitly for us there on the spot. He'd actually come into my work earlier that same day and we'd chatted then, although I didn't know who he was at the time. Nobody around knew Vic was going to die." (He died nine days later, on Christmas of that year.)

"So I met Thax after the [Vic Chestnutt] show and told him I'd heard him read and told him it was a beautiful poem. We kept on seeing each other around and then I asked him to come to a show after my first recording and asked if he would do a poem for the track. The track didn't have a name yet. After mixing and mastering I gave it the name "New Movements, Like Glaciers" after the poem."

Thax's poem:

*The loneliness of
parched wood beneath
your cliffside might
be imagined except
you'll touch it
before you touch
any rock. A glacier
of loneliness pouring
down the sides
like butter melting
too fast clouding
the atmosphere
so you won't
be able to see
if it congeals
into a river*

*at the bottom
or not.*

The poem couldn't be more perfectly placed, we both agree, and it feels surprisingly at home amidst the tension and inflection of notes in the song that are doing this backwards descent against themselves, a terse tug of war between sounds. I comment on how the poem informs the song and Randall agrees: "Because the poem that Thax wrote was haunting and he started recording in exactly the right place and ending in exactly the right place it fit so well. The way he paced it and where he ended coincidentally changes where the bass line does. The only thing I would change is to have him read another section where I've added another layer in the song. I would love him to have two poems on the track but it's amazing as is."

Putting the right words to what some might dub the perfect majesty of classical music is no easy maneuver, but somehow Thax gets it right. The poem fits the song like a velvet glove. While Thax and Randall had only just met, it ended up being a crucial collaboration that not only opened new doors but also helped close some difficult ones.

"It's kind of a special moment because Vic's music was amazing. He was a paraplegic from the time he was 18, so he played every show in a wheelchair with his acoustic guitar and he basically brought his life with him; in that he had a dark, funny humor about playing his songs. Just really touching. And I was happy to be there at that time after everything I had gone through [with his friends] and then [Vic] ended up dying. As much as a person who didn't know a guy can feel about a person who passed away due to depression it hit me pretty hard. After that I was just happy to have Thax come on to the album."

For awhile the Austin music scene struggled to come to terms with so many young lives lost. Esme Barrera, a Kindergarten teacher and wife of one Ted Leo, was another local figure whose death that year the musical community gathered around to collectively grieve. While tragic, the kinship shown selflessly in these moments are the reasons relationships are integral to the artist's emotional welfare and indeed, survival. While not an acquaintance of this woman, Randall recalls his reasons for playing the benefit show in the wake of her death. "Because in showing up you support the people that have supported you in hard moments." As in the case of Vic's death and Thax's poem, the integration of tragedy into art serves to birth more beautiful things. In coming together to make art collectively, artists both transform and transcend trauma.

In Randall's case you could certainly argue that forty-some deaths over the span of five years might constitute some trauma indeed. "Having your friends die on you really makes you an angry person," he says, "and I was angry for quite a long time. But then I came up with the words 'practice graciousness, reject illusions, and accept it.' I didn't want to be angry any longer around my friends who were alive and trying to support me." Accepting these deaths and honoring them has proven to be a fortuitous route for Randall. I point out how so much has come full circle from that dark time; and where once waste, now life. For the album that celebrated these lost lives has allowed him to live his in ways previously unimaginable. This is not to justify a terrible tragedy but to transform it in the only way possible. In the time since he put out his DEAD.CAT.CELLO album

Randall has continued to play with an eclectic assortment of musicians in and around town. Skeptics might find playing in five groups at once overwhelming but Randall just shrugs. For him it's another day in the life. In the end, hustle pays. After two years of playing co-conspirator for the infamous Reverend Glasseye (out of Boston) among other projects, Randall was handed an opportunity few musicians see. It was after another performance with Thax (now a good friend) that Yann Tiersen first introduced himself. The French musician and multi-instrumentalist best known in certain circles for his contributions to the Amelie soundtrack, this brief exchange became the door to fulfilling a decade-long dream.

It wasn't long after their initial introduction that Yann extended Randall an official invitation to headline La Route du Rock with him and his band that summer. Not only would he play alongside a creative hero of his, but he would do so as Tiersen headlined the largest festival in France with over 10,000 attendees. It was, as one can imagine, surreal.

Or, in Randall's words: painful. Very painful. As in "11 hours a day rehearsing for several days. I had to start wearing my wrist bracelets and taking Advil and drinking lots of wine to make it through every day."

Not that it mattered. "I was maybe 12 years old the first time I said 'hey, it might be really cool to play cello for Yann Tiersen someday' and then 12 years later it happened," Randall confesses. I was curious as to how one sums up what could be called a peak experience with a longtime musical idol. "Well how do you explain getting to play with Michael Jordan on the basketball court?" Randall asks.

"For anyone to be on the same playing field as one of their heroes is a lifetime goal checked off the list. I thought about the possibility for over a decade and then it happened. I felt like the Rookie of the Year, that sort of thing. We had 16 members in the band, a five person choir, three horns, two cellos, and then the regular person rock band with two drummers. It was incredible. I do have to say that my favorite time of the trip was maybe five o' clock in the morning at the hotel after a long rehearsal and we had to be up at nine to start again. It was just me with a box of wine and a large bottle of Jameson pouring both into my Yann's mouth. Just the two of us alone. From a box!" And the way he tells it, it almost didn't happen. He laughs and lights a cigarette. I've lost track of the count since we've started our conversation.

"I didn't get my passport until two days before we left. There was a two-month delay. I had my CD release party two days before we left for France and still no passport. Down to the wire. I didn't even know if we were going at that point." But it arrived just in time and so Randall went, accompanied by his cello Julia and his sister Barbara (also a cellist). It proved to be both a physical test of endurance as well as proof that Randall's music was finding its footing in circles well outside of Austin. Several songs off his dead.cat.cello album are now being used in a film touring the festival circuit called *Hold Out*. Although not yet released or available to the public, it's become an important vehicle for exposing new audiences to his music outside of America. Again too, the experience of film in conjunction with music helps re-frame the ways in which Randall's sound can be appreciated. Indeed he is an enthusiast of the collaboration, saying "The way they've paired my music with the moments in the film is brilliant." Not all musicians are so lucky to have such profitable pairings, especially

when the collaborator has little to no exposure to their music. Thus creating music that for all intents and purposes transcends traditional definition has helped propel-rather than pigeonhole-Randall's career. There are many musicians, including Yann Tiersen, who have spent years advancing the sound of historically "classical" instruments with the help of pedals, loops and other digital detritus of the modern age. Yet still there remains the stereotype of stoic (or worse yet, stodgy) music to constantly confront when playing a new audience.

"It's interesting to me that you describe yourself as a cellist while avoiding the definitions that traditionally accompany that title. You tend to avoid any such stereotypes while including sounds typically found in punk or metal genres, certainly seen as the enemy of some classicists."

"I mean, I listen to a wide variety of music like anybody," Randall explains. "I'm classically trained but I haven't played classical music for a long time. I left the conservatory eight years ago (he won't tell me which one) and have been breaking down the classical walls every since, playing with other bands and doing my cello thing which is deeply rooted in history while being very experimental. There's delay, degeneration so things get noisy and weird. While melodies can be more classically-based with harmonies and such, adding the loop board makes it an interesting journey every time I get to play. I have a very collected idea of the song with both the structure and melodies stabilized but the emotion is organic and completely changes each time. I've never played a song the same way twice, but there's always a certain feeling when I have the song in mind."

Although not a performer myself, this strikes me as natural. As a writer I revolve around the same idea quite a bit while constantly re-framing it in different words. For a work of art is never static, never fixed. The artist only chooses a convenient ending, a way to frame the story that needs to be told. But an ending is only an ending when we say so.

Randall disagrees on a minor difference in the experience. "Not until it's hung on a wall. Then there it is. Not until it's hung on a wall can an onlooker or passerby see that the space is different, that something is where it wasn't before. Which is kind of like the difference between literature and music—once they're finished they're done. Everything is going to change organically in the meantime but once they're up on the wall it's there. But as a musician, doing the music I do, every time you experience the music it's going to change drastically. But the feeling will be communicated each time."

It's a difference I have pondered, the endless manifestation that happens with songs over time while stories are rarely re-written once published. I point out that no art should be regurgitated regardless of whether it's performed or painted. No one should be forced to play something that has become boring or redundant.

"I think at the same time, like everyone else, that my pieces are boring and redundant," Randall says, and this sentiment I understand enough to laugh alongside. Regardless of what any artist does, it will never be enough.

He explains that “the difference between a recording and live music is the moment you go to a show, and if the band is organic and they play a song that you know and love from a recording but it’s different. Otherwise you could just sit at home. But live music takes you outside. There are always difficulties with performance but that leads to evolution. And I like that. I like that it takes a familiar song and makes it different than what you expect it to be. Like, here I am behind my cello and as scary as that is I’m pretty much bare, with high emotions coming through me and my hardware and going out to you. Depending on how I’m feeling or how the audience is reacting or what the aliens are telling me it will be wildly different.”

I ponder this as I go pee, and then Randall teases me about my fast pee technique. Then I ask him to tell me about his new band, one of the main reasons we are having this conversation in the first place, besides the fact that we rarely get to hear each other’s voices. Even after touring with Yann Tiersen and crossing a lifelong goal off the bucket list, the formation of this new band, a three-piece called KNEST, is something to crow about. Together with experimental musicians Jonathan Horne (of too many collaborations to list) and Thor Harris (the original drummer for Shearwater and just off a year-long tour with Swans), the full range of instruments comprises a ridiculous spectrum. Randall paints me a picture of what I could expect were I to catch them in person: “On the songs there is bass, cello, guitar, a homemade hammered dulcimer, oscillator, marimba, loops, pedals, and full drum kit.”

An impressive array and more importantly, a good step in the right direction. After all, what would even the best instruments be without a keen hand to play them? The extraordinary levels of musicianship each member brings to the band is without a doubt the reason for Randall’s giddy excitement. The thrill is palpable as he describes playing with musicians who have been holding their own in the business for 20 some odd years more than him, who have been around the block with bands that have made it big in many regards but who continue to pursue the edge of music elsewhere. It is a real artist who plays for the visceral pleasure of playing, removed from the pressure of pleasing. Although there is no fear of that when it comes to these three. When trying to describe the experience of playing with experimental music freaks the likes of these guys, Randall states how “I had to pick up my cello and walk over to Jonathan and kick him in the foot to pay attention to Thor. Like ‘holy fucking shit look at what he’s doing I don’t know what to do with that.’” He means the fact that a lot of the instruments listed above are played by Thor at once. No easy feat for many, the man “will have a dulcimer solo and then walk over the drum set and play left-handed while playing drums with his right and his feet. In time with my beat.”

At the time of this interview KNEST has only played one show. While some bands slog it out over the long run, performing critically acclaimed music that escapes appreciation from the populous (or vice versa), KNEST seems destined for a certain success. The fusion of experimental jazz/prog/punk/weird fucking shit (Randall’s words) by accomplished musicians can only be a harbinger of more exciting times to come. Randall is mum about the future of his band when probed about a record deal in the works. But after opening for A Silver Mt. Zion this past February, it seems that the right people are aware of what he can do, and are watching to see where he’ll go with it next. For someone who has cut his teeth with major players early in his career, it is saying something indeed that Randall admits to feeling out of his league. Then again, holding his own might be more

in the head than anything else. For as he says when questioned about their chemistry “since the first time we sat down together we felt kinship. We had never played together before, but after ten minutes could have played a show that night. We had enough material for three different albums in ten different styles. It just works that way between us. I get out of rehearsal with them and it doesn’t matter what time of day it is—evening, daytime—I am emotionally exhausted.”

For a man who has seen plenty of death for one lifetime, that is saying a lot. But that is the nature of the beast, it seems to give it all every time because any other option isn’t enough. Or at least for Randall Holt that is the case. In the meantime, we’ll watch and wait to see what sounds emerge; a reminder that beauty always waits on the other side.



Terra Firma by Jessica Huang

In my dreams I never fly.

I've heard people describe it, though, and I can picture what it would be like, that moment between lift off and landing, the moment where physics hesitates and the clouds cradle them. The moment when they realize they can.

My sister describes it casually, her middle finger pressing up crumbs from the counter, her eyebrows raised and forehead shining. 'I start by hopping, rolling through the arches, like we do in Julia's class, small sotés.' Kate has perfect sotés, her feet extend past her toes, just like Julia says they should.

'And as each jump gets higher and higher, I realize I'm using less and less effort. I feel like I'm climbing the air, almost. But lightly. Does that make sense?' she smiles the secret smile of those who know.

I nod, bite my cheek, cross my arms over my awkward not-quite chest. A ragged thumb slips into a damp armpit. My clothes don't fit right.

'And then at some point I jump. I jump and don't land and instead, hover somewhere above. And I can feel the wind on the soles of my feet and beneath my dress and I know I'm able. I know exactly what I'm able to do.'

She places the crumbs delicately on her tongue, unaware that they were from my breakfast, the evidence of a more masculine approach to solitary pancakes; fast fisted forkfuls, like a steelworker, my mother says. Kate closes her lips around my crumbs, considers, continues.

'I push myself using a secret force; I float myself higher and higher, careful not to let myself get scared, careful to look down barely and with grace. This force comes from, well, you know where. Deep inside. And using it, I can coast on barest of breezes.'

My sister recently got her period and she reminds me every chance she gets. She's smug. She knows she's viable.

'And then, oh my god, then I'm rushing.' Her eyes brighten. 'Below me it's our neighborhood at first, I can see the top of Mrs. Mower's hat as she waters the garden. The arcing spray so clear from above, a perfect parabola. Then I'm beyond that, into something wild, into rusty rock landscapes with spiked grass patches poking through, warm wooded hilltops with flocks of sparrows who wing with me, waterfalls and rivers and oceans, crystal from way up high, and soon even that's a blur. I just see rushing, rushing, rushing joy.'

She finishes, smiles, licks her lips. 'How about you?'

I lie in bed each night, imagining what she sees. Imagining the drop of my stomach as my toes leave the earth, hoping that if I imagine hard enough, I'll get just a moment's taste, a gust before I wake up from excitement. I don't, though. In my dreams, I'm decidedly land bound.

"Don't pick at that," I scorn, "That's disgusting." I cup the remaining crumbs and swipe them to the floor.

I cannot fly because I am too heavy. Because every time I jump, gravity grips my ankles, yanking me to the floor. Like a baby elephant, Julia says to me. You sound like a hoofed thing.

[^](#)

It Is Time by Peycho Kanev

I made a promise! I stop hating myself. Yes!
Anyways, that's God's job and of his forsaken
children. Why I got this thumb? For holding
the knife or lifting the club and beat my brother
down? For counting money or spreading the butter
on yesterday's slices of bread? I made
a promise and I will stick to it. Do you hear me,
Onan and you too, Sisyphus? I will stop punishing
myself with alcohol and bad books, from now
on I am starting pleasing myself with words. Oh,
yes! This is my first poem. My reward is waiting for me
at the corner of the hungry typewriter and the stack
of empty leaves and I am here to claim it! It is time!
For poetry and for some astonishing beauty. Hey,
Time! My fearsome collar-scholar, it is time for you
to fall on your knees in front of these words. If you
don't do it I will make you. Right, Horace? Yes, I know.
The darkness of blackness will miss me, but I have
to do it. There is no other way and there will never be. Now
and then. My path is clear. The crows of my lines are
circling the magnitude of my boiling words. But the battle
has just begun. The scarecrows of my bookish fields are
strangely still, the wind comes and goes. I prefer to listen
to the whisper of the clouds instead of some stupid
and banal babble of the bottle! Can you see the light over
there? Shining on the edge of the horizon? Well, I do!
Hence, the time has come! I am pouring myself the cup of
Dante and starting all over again. With nothing to lose!

Small Revenge by Peycho Kanev

I don't care about the metrics, the iambus
and the rhymes—I have read the classics and then
I've put them back on their dusty shelves:
we write about something that comes from the guts
and the nails as the flowers outside
explode...
The poetry, can I say that I don't care?
I prefer to drink alone in this room in front of
one candle
as the shadows in the corners sits and show us
their ugly faces;
ah, I know that the words are greater than we thought
and we will fall in their holes,
we will spill ourselves like ink upon the Chaucer's paper:
let me be myself while I read the classics,
let me be afraid in airplanes,
let me be bored in churches,
let me be silent before the tigers in my blood:
these words are too tuff for us to misspend them
just like the big boys during their time.
The rivers are flowing through me
and I burn like matchstick lighted by the words
of all Shakespeares...
And today I am closer to insanity,
I am watching the black birds on the wires,
waiting for our degradation,
for our small defeat while we walk upon the land of
Dylan and Frost, especially on the thin ice
of Frost...
...find me one small torch,
not too big, just big enough to set this night on fire
and I can hear outside the young girls laugh,
never heard about the hunger of Villon or the madness of Pound,
please feed me so well and I'll never again use their words,
let me find a little warmth,
allow me to find my sunflowers
shaking in the wind

and under the sun
and the God of the Word not Death.



The Empty Well by Psycho Kanev

A single neuron in my brain is going *Ha-Ha*,
like a hungry beast that dwells in the well.
And all of these things shouldn't happen if:
I hadn't closed the door, if I had come inside
and looked in your eyes.
But now the walls are painted in red,
in your spectrum. This is beautiful enough to dry
your eyes, but you are singing silly songs.
I am somewhere else! From the urn on the mantel,
someone is pointing his finger at me.



Heliotroph's First Hand-Job by Coop Lee

i celebrate my successes with pancake breakfast.
and i light off fireworks in my driveway; in my kitchen; in my car; beside the river;
in my living room ::grandma hopping from her seat with a jiggly-dance of surprise.
wisps of smoke linger in the air.

// party stanza //

outside i'm bad boy.
inside i'm sweetheart.
all the girls close enough know this.
they do with it what they will.
i slurp a slurpable at the frostee-glo
watching girls shift about
in their weekend electric.

i see everything play out before it even happens.
i have that gift; or curse;
because it sucks my life of all the risk.
and without risk we wither,
and we bleed out from the brains::
right there, in front of everybody; my brain;
oozing and mixing with chili-cheese fries.
girl::
she puts herself to myself,
and our selves become more than they ever were;
more than they'll ever think to be,
more than they'll ever hold to the darkness alone.
her body; my body; our
smattering of colors.
i flip her onto her back ::dance fibers::
so this; so me; pressing my hard into her soft::
bearing down into her glossy::
she laughs and weeps; like boom; then whispers in my ear.
culminato lingering;
she trembles in that long-end-tremble //pancake breakfast//
life foreseen::
pay the rent::
buy an eighth::

meander half-stoned, half-asleep, wholly horny through the aisles of WinCo, staring at a soccer-mom's yoga-pants'd-ass; so well contained; so much like cantelope telepathically bound to my chub.



The Man with the Golden Cock by Coop Lee

travel
make love
work
the way the lamp-lit-lot glowed on just my car
her hand against the window
i made money selling workout equipment: thigh hump gear
door-to-door,
my teeth
drank vodka in the dark of my motel

like, sippy sip, on my juice cup
yeppy yep, yup yup
they squirmed on me: those beams of heat
like diagonal-cut colors
she laid her body against mine
throttled at something butterscotch
used my belt

i had no idea my cock was so fucking fierce
so formed to rip her abdomen out like that
goddamn
it took all night to clean up her guts
like yolk
soaked into the mattress

Plutonian Nyborg by Coop Lee

rough raggedy punches
to my smooth somewhat sexy face
that fucker
that face fucker
my loverboy sway breaks
by fire cold motion all at once
in that;
that strange messy darkness
that phantasmagorian light:
city skymorphic
she was stuck in my mind
and all i could do was spit teeth
under luminesce
under bloody clump of bathroom
i rebirth

i frost my nostrils with plutonian nyborg
and dance like nasty
dance like sasquatchy
dance along the curb eating tangerine, and yeah
it might mean nothing
but i love:
motherfuckingtangerine

*

later moments:
i ease my thoughts along chrometipped strawberries
girls with rollerkicks
royale with cheese
seering its electric to my tongue
the stars rust as my drip drip
does as he does
night thick
beachy wet
the other she licks at my bloody
the other she licks at my molten
wastelust, thus i am.

thus;
some die in love.



Molten Sky by Coop Lee

Toasters melt to the swelty-swelter.
Bolts and dinosaurs and sky all goop together
into liquid faces that touch the Sun.
That roadway heat and breeze; that tone.
That euphoric unknown.
My feet bare and blistered.
Graveling the ground, the grass, the moments;

Moments of thinking as each bird does, each hill, each lovely plastic shard.
Scapes wear their worn-ups and their keys to places, places of elsewhere, of where winds on rivers and
highway rails blanket and blush.
Touch my chin, touch my face, those windy-winds.
Out of the dark, and dreams, and places where them men stole at my flesh.

Them men with evil teeth.
Them men that made their tapes; their videos.
My blood naked hopes.
That tomato soup, that fuzzy Johnny Carson, that mattress.
They brought friends, little friends, little lovers, little people for me to love.
They made spurts, like phosphorus, their boxes of reels and conduit cords; pluggy-plugs.
They worshipped ceiling gods and the things they said; the dust as it fell between the beams of light.
Power-nerve-server wires n gyres radiating back, men and eye-sockets, places to put your faith into.
Places of the drippy-drip.
And they smiled and smiled. Them men; in shadowy bent forms.
Them men that stole my flesh.

I run breathe gone,
On tracks of long-stretch, pieces of existence put to motion moving face to face.
Chrome wooded pulp and lippy-lips.
I and that spirit of Roland, that headless trench-jack, that black-jack, that man without a head.
We tongue along gaps of crystalline earth, taste the places gone, the places once been.
Our faces shine of burnt been happenings.
Our edges tug like black flickers, mean flickers of madness.
That molten sky.

Those lost kids, those lost little thoughts, they:::
They find a human-hand in a field, everything is wet, the leaves the sky the faces dripping.
A skinny boy who wears girls' dresses, that flowery-little-soaked-dressy-dress, he took that hand away from our

eyes, he took it to the river, and the world has it now.
The world has that hand now.

Little Magnavox-shell Zippy: the baby who sleeps in a gutted television.
Zippy and his turtley-television-shell.
Little baby-face, little baby.

His brother is a dog-boy, unbroken, fleshing on flesh of dark tastes and truths.
He licks his knife for fun and the fun licks the air, and those he holds in wet places,
and those he holds.

[^](#)

Decision to Sing by Neila Mezynski

Right here between four walls window brown tree, no sympathy. Unremitting thirst. Think. Do go through step, bread milk gas car party child, real gold is. Listen. Baby intact. Steep price paid each intention/invention, gold from big brain, no one else. Dig. Slippery slop. Truth hidden behind noisy train comin. Listen specially hard if fat lady isn't through but near. Singin. Train comin. No horn. Either. Not polite like ocean not the same, gold; hysterical, her scream start singin, he said, choose one, listen. It/her say need. What. Keep on singin that scream. Alone on that empty ocean. Polite. There. It is. Chopin.



Henrietta by Adam Moorad

Blood dripped from the cow's nose ring. Judd dangled from her hindquarters, boots aloft, his arm shoulder-deep as she rocked and whooped, giving off an air of authority and stupidity.

"I can't hold on much longer," he said. "It's been hours."

"Just close your eyes," I said. "Try to pull."

Her tail fenced with his nose and he winced as it lashed his brow.

"Fuck it," he said. "I give up."

The cow groaned woefully and wallowed in a semicircle. I could smell her pheromone around me. Great gray brains of cloud swirled in the sky above as she lowered Judd onto the prairie. He withdrew his arm. In his palm, a handful of guts, some of it blue.

"What is that stuff?" I said.

He touched his thumb to his index.

"Can't be certain," he said. "It feels like honey." Then he held his hand under his nose and made a sour face. "Kind of smells like phosphorus."

He dropped his arm and the matter dripped from his fingers. The tendrils unfurled and congealed like slugs in the sun.

"I don't know what to do," Judd said. He caressed the cow's snout with the back of his wrist. "I can't leave her like this. It ain't right."

I envied his concern for her and the world before me. It filled me with a helpless, destined feeling. She was worth more than me. So I imagined.

"Why not?" I said.

"She'll die."

"I kind of wish she would."

"We won't have any milk."

The cow grunted as if she had picked up his drawl and a wave of spasm rippled through her fur.

"What else can we do?" I said.

Judd folded his arms and circled the cow stroking his chin in contemplation.

"I suppose we could have hamburgers."

"She'd feed an army."

"Decisions," he said. "Decisions."

Taken with curiosity, I poked the cow's haunch. Her entire torso palpitated and I distanced myself. She shifted her rear. It dribbled on the grass. Eventually, she fluctuated.

Judd pinched his nose. "I'm not going back in there," he said.

"Then you better put her down."

He closed his eyes and whispered something. I couldn't decipher it. I guess he was praying.

"I'm tired," he said. "Let's get it over with."

He collected the yoke and the cow mooed in agony. As she tugged back, our eyes met. Her black bulbs sequenced with a distressed beauty, invoking a maternal instinct. Suddenly, I felt a hot flash. I knew humans got that way about animals, but I didn't know I did.

"Wait," I said and stepped between them. "Let me have a go."

Judd surrendered the yoke and stood aside.

"If you have a death wish," he said. "Then be my guest."

The cow stammered anxiously as I squared my shoulders to her pelvis. I was happy with the chance to be of use. I wanted to be the one who saw it through and saved her when no one else could. People would talk about it. I hoped I would be liked.

"Do you know what you're doing?" Judd said.

I spat into my hands and rubbed them together.

"Yeah yeah yeah," I said. "How hard can it be?"

"You'd be surprised."

I peered into the split where he had entered before. I plugged my fist inside and the cow's stance hardened.

"Be careful," Judd said. "If she bucks, she'll kill you."

She constricted around my elbow and moaned a little. Judd took a knee. He dug into his breast pocket and produced a brass harmonica. He cleared his throat, sawed the instrument across lips with his soiled hand and blew. The soporific harmony wheezed around us. It calmed the cow into a lackadaisical sway. I leaned in step with lead as I stirred through her fathoms.

"I feel a bunch of different things," I said. "What am I looking for?"

Judd paused. "You'll know it when you find it," he said. "It'll feel like a bone."

He wiped his slobber from the mouthpiece on his shirt and resumed his serenade. I verged deeper, wrenching my hand along the wall of a ribbed cavity. The cow spread her legs and allowed me deeper. I probed my fingers across a lobe of mossy texture. I clutched it and squeezed and detected the vague click of cartilage between my fingertips. When I tugged, her flanks heaved and legs buckled.

Judd leapt up. He dropped the harmonica and hurried over.

"You're hurting her," he said. "She's getting pissed."

"I think I have it," I said.

"Are you sure?"

I worked my hand around an object somewhere in the dark. It felt like a bone, but what did I know.

"Oh yeah," I said. "Like, 100 percent."

"Got a grip?" he said.

I clenched my hand and gave him a nod.

"Good," he said. "Now don't let go."

He took me by the ankles and jerked my body parallel to the ground. The bone began to kick the cow's insides and she cried. My bicep burned as I curled. I was worried. I didn't know what was happening. I wondered what actually was.

"Hold on," Judd said.

"I'M HOLDING," I snapped.

He brushed his thigh across my prone knoll. I flailed my heel backwards, catching his sternum.

He giggled. "That's nice," he said. "I like it when you're angry."

"Stop it."

"What?" he said. He brushed me again. "This is as kinky as it gets."

"It hurts," I said. "You're an asshole."

As the cow began to dilate, her inertia waned. She cantered from side to side, unleashing a pained yawp with every movement, though I doubt she felt anything but fear.

Judd's clutch tightened around my ankles. The cow lurched in the opposite direction, ripping my spine taut. The ache of it needled through me. Then my vision went cloudy. If there'd been anything in my bowls, I'd have messed myself.

"It's coming," he said.

"I can feel it."

The cow labored forward, musk fretting from every orifice. A final push and the bone breeched the passage, a little limb that protruded from cow's end.

Judd released me and I fell on my face. He seized the limb and delivered series of forceful yanks, the look of glory on his face. I didn't know what else to do but lie there and watch him extract a small calf from the gap.

It squirmed through the threshold, hooves-first in a drizzle of fluid. The cow toppled onto the prairie and hushed, careening as if the wind had been kicked out of her. It happened so gracefully we knew she was dead.

Judd watched her and sighed. "I thought she'd do that," he said. "But not like that."

The calf rose meekly behind her and floundered about, somersaulting through the grass in our direction. It shivered rudely and blinked its innocent eyes.

"Would you look at that," I said. "Is it a boy or a girl?"

"I don't know," he said. "It's veal."



Fools Like Me by John Pistelli

Greenman dreamed of their first meeting, seven years ago, during his final year of college and her first of law school.

The weather warmly dripped and ensconced the campus. Storms like art restorers had scrubbed the twilight sky bright; it glowed with pink-shot cerulean. All the leaves of the city had cracked wetly through their dull wooden cages at once, raw and luminous.

The art department had mounted the last exhibit of the semester—a showcase of the graduating seniors' final projects—in a high-walled white gallery. Without any set theme or medium, the blank space enclosed a chaos of colors, shapes and ideas. Grubby objects at the room's four corners suggested a flea market: a school drinking fountain, an obsolete telephone booth, a typewriter, a hand-mower. The decline of the nation, or of its middling classes anyway, emerged as the main artistic incitement, Greenman noted as he strolled alone in a burgundy silk shirt among the artworks. At the head of the room, an automobile's system of axles hung high and greasy on the wall; its maker obviously intended it to be the show's presiding image. Greenman observed with faint derision the consummately professional irony of the piece's title: *Cruciform*.

He turned his attention from the far wall and saw proof of the rumor he had heard earlier that day. The ironist had been usurped, the sham-crucifix had been upstaged, by a mute act of authentic and autonomous creation. In the middle of the gallery, a notorious obsessive and recluse who scarcely spoke in classes and so had the reputation of a sufferer from mental illness, had somehow erected a crystalline tree some ten feet high. Built of a thousand or more small glass slivers, like the ornaments that dangled down from chandeliers, the slim-trunked tree spread its branches in high arcs over the gallery-goers, glinting and refracting and diffusing the white light, casting a gently clarifying radiance on all the broken objects hauled sardonically out of the social wreckage. The vast jumbled room became unified by the tree's presence: it became different from the world outside. As the show began, all eyes oriented themselves by the tree's silvery light.

The people whispered and murmured in wonder, envy, or curiosity. Who had paid for this? The university didn't give out grants large enough to cover its expense. A government grant of the requisite size, devolving upon an undergraduate no less, was unlikely in the present circumstances. Perhaps the strange, silent student was a trust-funder, thrown out of Oxford or Yale for some glamorous reason—poor grades, erotic scandal, the irreconcilable madness of genius—and whose way was thus paid in this slum of a public research university. As it happened, the school daily reported the next day, incidentally, amid their coverage of the violence, that the student came from nothing and the project had been supported by a green philanthropist; in conformity with the patron's ethics, the glass was wholly recycled—Greenman speculated much later that perhaps the glass of a thousand mansion's chandeliers really had been transmuted from the base of greedy decoration to the silver of generous art. The artist had given the piece a wittily self-mocking but subtly self-praising title, alluding to an old and bad tree poem by a writer named Joyce. All the questions of money and meaning rebounded from the tree's reflective surface back into the faces of the questioners, as if to demand what they meant by being so mean-minded in such a glowing room.

The spell was soon broken, and the gallery-goers milled around with attention only half-fixed on the art. Mostly students, shuffling in their soaked shoes, dreaming of end-of-semester pleasures and parties, they spent the remainder of their attention on their devices. All their eyes darted between screen and wall; half their ears were plugged up by bulbous speakers.

Greenman, his hands in his pockets, sans device and sans date, stomach-spasmingly hungry, inconspicuously approached the refreshments table toward the rear of the gallery, with the goal of filling a clear plastic cup full of cheap white wine, a red plastic plate with bread crusts and cheese and olives, and escaping into the aqueous night to contemplate its present perfection and to avoid thinking of his uncertain future, a future that had little paying place for the artist he wanted to be. Such would be his night's dinner.

His thin cup grew weighty with golden light under the wine-box's tap as he happened to look toward his own contribution to the show and saw, obscuring it, a curiously smart couple. They stood out from the art-school types, who tended to favor either the tattered dress of world-condemning saints or the outlandish fashion of the would-be superhuman: no, these two were proud professionals, the man with cropped hair and a suit, its jacket thrown over his arm, his other arm entwined with that of the woman, who wore a bruise-colored blouse, slim black skirt, black tights, and high heels. Greenman softly walked behind the couple and drank down his wine too quickly.

The man was saying, "It looks absurd in this context. Like it's from two hundred years ago."

A smile crinkled the side of one soft-painted lip: "I like it."

"You'll tell me it's not serious. An historical commentary on this way of painting. I did my gen-ed requirements too..."

"No. Look at her expression. The tension in the smile: exhausted, resentful love, not on her face but in the whole mood of it. The fold between the eyebrows, sleep caught in the corners of her eyes. She's been making dinner, washing dishes, feeding everybody. Look—" she illicitly pushed the tip of her index finger toward the image until the surface halted it, flattened it against the impasto even as her eyes peered through it, narrowing—"at the thin sheen of water on her hands, look how red they are. They're raw but glowing, they're flesh but spirit. It's a true thing. We decide what to do with it, but it's real."

"Who needs this kind of thing, though? We have cameras. And the title—*Grandmother*—what is he trying to do, apply for some kind of old-fashioned psychotherapy? The painting cure? Or sell conservative books about the good old days? Or just make a fucking joke out of everything? Come on, Mona, you can't really like this painting."

"I didn't say I liked it; I said it was true."

"That'll really stand up in court, honey. What, is this guy a friend of yours?"

"Never met him, don't care. I'm not praising him. I'm praising the truth that bothered to show its face on his canvas."

Greenman wanted to say something but could think of no response. Which was just as well, because it was then that the violence began.

There were five to their group, not counting the two Rottweilers, which, if they stood, would have been the tallest creatures in the gallery. Everyone heard the dogs' cries—that was what alerted them that some danger had arrived. Each howl was double-voiced: a profound, expansive, echoing bellow and a high and keening whine: an explosion with violent mourning. Humanity tries to keep this sound out of places like the gallery, because it comes hot and unstoppable, like lava, from a riven, warring, half-forgotten place very far below the world we have built. Hearing that cry, Greenman felt as if his bowels had been turned burningly to ice. His brain went on wryly chattering, though—he supposed that some conceptualist had installed the dogs with the intention of problematizing the boundary between nature and culture. Someone's mutilation and death would certify the artist's statement: nature and culture indistinguishable, the archaic and the post-modern one and the same substance, all boundaries effaced by the mess on the marble floor. In the icy silence of the white room, Greenman exchanged a brief glance with the sharply-dressed woman who had admired his painting. Her mouth was twisted into a grimace by primordial fear, but something droll, something amusedly from elsewhere, a higher elsewhere rather than a lower, played in her hazel eyes. They wanted to laugh, and somehow Greenman did too.

Everyone recognized soon enough that the dogs' tethers were held by members of the group who occupied the center of the room, just beneath the sheltering branches of the crystal tree. In black coats and red bandanas, with sunglasses covering their eyes, they were anonymous and featureless. Each member of the group produced what looked like small flashlights, and they shone powerful purple beams across the room's four walls. Black light. Messages had been stamped invisibly across every piece of art, across the empty spaces on the walls, and these theses now strobed with all-caps insistence wherever the cell members cast their disillusioned gaze.

BREAD BEFORE BEAUTY

THE ART INSTITUTION IS AN EXPROPRIATION OF THE COMMON

ART REPRESENTS ENACTS ENFORCES PRIVILEGE

WHITE WALLS ERASE HUMANITY

EVERY WORK OF ART IS A THEFT FROM THE HUNGRY

YOUR IRONIES WILL NOT PROTECT YOU

THE CRITICISM OF ART MUST GIVE WAY TO ITS LIQUIDATION

THE ONLY TRUE MASTERPIECE IS THE JUST SOCIETY

Greenman's brain ran on. So these were the roving guerillas, the cultural revolutionaries he had read about, facing a world that had no use for them, seizing weapons from the revolutionary archive their sophisticated professors tended, determined to force a crisis, so desperate to clear some common ground that they would

do it with fire. This was their second strike and their coming-out party: An old professor of religion had been found just the other day on the outskirts of campus, her skull caved in by a brick. And now they were here.

They allowed each Rottweiler to leap. Across the room from Greenman, people turned and ran for the gallery doors—they looked suddenly so unfashionable, so awkward, flinging up their hands, unable to close their jaws, bounding with an almost childish abandon. One of the dogs jumped with its huge clawed front paws on a woman's back, forcing her to the floor, and began, even as she fell, to chew through the back of her neck. The other dog ran at Greenman, because all the people around him had scattered while he was rooted in place. No—the woman who had defended him, she too stood where she was, even as her companion tried to pull her away.

The falling shadow of the dog slowed down time until it froze and became a space that Greenman could move through. A maneuver he had seen once in an action movie or comic book returned to him. Into the slow time, he thrust his left arm, bent at the elbow so that it paralleled his chest. The Rottweiler then crashed through the pane of frozen time with its furious pointed snout. Dull yellow teeth bared through sneeringly in-folded lips of rotten meat hurled themselves at Greenman and sunk deep into the flesh of his forearm. He understood the first wave of pain contemplatively; he seemed to be operating his body from a great distance. With the dog affixed to him tooth to bone in a crazy kiss, Greenman took three steps forward: the dog's neck twisted around as it held onto its prey. It was looking backward, a posture so vulnerable it was almost human. Greenman then stepped to the side and pulled his wounded arm flat against his chest, fist thumping heart, like a man swearing a pledge—and snapped the dog's neck with an flat click. It dropped from him and hit the marble like a raw beef torso. The appreciatix of Greenman's art ran to him as his self flooded back into full physical presence and assumed the burden of pain. The sleeve of his silk shirt was in bloody tatters, a captured flag. Across the room, the other dog fed on the woman it had killed, her blonde hair up-spilling, stained, from what looked like a bloody hole in the floor.

While Greenman had been entranced by his ordeal, the guerilla group was setting fire to the gallery. They now retreated toward the exit, but they paused, even as the room filled up with the acrid smoke of burning plastic, the smoke just barely concealing the abattoir reek of fresh blood and blood-sheathed meat. Each guerilla bent to his or her boot and pulled out a small revolver; they leveled their guns at the center of the room and fired. The gunshots sounded like the first part of the dogs' howl but without the keening, moaning, mourning cry.

Greenman had several times dreamed that this was his wedding day, that in the smoky room hung with all the blowing crystal shards of the shattered crystalline tree, each one burning with a piece of firelight it had captured, Mona had slipped a ring upon his blood-slick finger, and then and there they became one. In fact, they didn't even start dating until several months after the destruction of the gallery, and weren't married until two years later. According to Mona, Greeman lost consciousness just as the tree was destroyed.

Antarctic Expedition, 1912 by William Reichard

Once the ship had been crushed by ice,
they knew they would die. Each night,
as they tried to sleep inside tents fashioned
out of tattered sails, they heard the wooden
vessel cry. High pitched, sometimes;
sometimes, low and rumbling.
That which was never intended to snap
did just that, planks three feet thick
breaking easy in the ice's grip, like
kindling for a fire they would never build.
It kept them from sleep, the unflagging cold,
the deadly bite of winter's teeth.
The ship's scientist had brought along
a camera. A week after they'd eaten
the last of the dogs, he pulled out his cases
of useless instruments and started to record.
No one needed to know the temperature.
No one needed to know the wind's speed.
It blew through everything—canvas, wood,
walls of ice—it penetrated the skin
like merciless needles, sutured the eyes
shut with tears. With matted hair
and chaffed faces, frost-blackened noses,
they posed. The scientist labeled each negative
with his subjects' names, then packed
the plates in sturdy wooden frames,
placed them in a hut made from the last of the ship.
Some men posed singly, as if sitting for a portrait.
Some in groups, the ship's crushed hull
their stark backdrop. They were already ghosts.

Autumn Sequence by William Reichard

I.

In the unexpected heat of a late autumn day,
speak aloud all of those things you don't want.
Call them out by their names. They can't hide
in the sharp October light. They can't be buried
under brittle brown leaves. Say their names
and they'll appear, one by one. They'll look
at you. And then, they'll disappear.

II.

Everything smells so ripe and done.
Dry leaves skitter along the street.
Listless bees move from flower to flower
but nothing's left to eat.
My body wants to pull itself apart,
my limbs want to scatter themselves
among the weeds and wild asters.
Twenty years ago I didn't know
what a wild aster was, or why autumn
always brought me to my knees
in breathless fear and prayer.
Now I know why these things occur,
and I say, everything that has the will
to bloom is a flower.

III.

Wrens at the feeder in early November.
A single white cosmos blooms atop
a spindly stem. Blood red lilies' stalks
are dry and brown, their leaves resemble
long blades. Some boys are going
door to door, offering to rake or
bag leaves for cash. Everywhere,
houses in foreclosure. The inhabitants
abandon their lives. The neighborhood
fills with strays. A black cat approaches,
sweet and small. I give him some food
and water, and he quietly moves on.

Faith by William Reichard

I've come to believe there is no god, just a balance
of sorts: each bad thing weighted against a good.
In this sense, the ancient Egyptians had it right:
the god Horace with his scale, each human heart
weighed against a feather before entry to
the underworld was granted. I doubt anyone
could make that journey now. There is no bird
with feathers heavy enough to match the burden
of the human heart. It's in the news everyday:
a war here, holocaust there, a desert country
starving while some men own cars worth
more than the gross economy of a small nation.
When the rich lose anything, they weep at their
bitter misfortune. When the poor have nothing,
they don't wonder what it means to lose.



Seven Wonders by William Reichard

A resolute man, in his hunger for wonder,
goes searching for the next best thing.
The first Seven Wonders are inconsolable.
Their time is done.
Each starts to take itself apart, brick
by brick by log by stone. Each leaves enough
so that the man might be punished
when he sees what's become of them.
He travels for years and thinks he finds
new wonders. His suitcase expands
and contracts as he adds, then subtracts
those things he thought were rarities.
Time passes and winds blow
and finally, everything left is buried
in sand, except for the artifacts
housed in museums. But even these
don't thrive. Roman marble faces
on proper British walls grow sad
and sag until they're expressionless.
No one remembers what the great Sphinx
said and the Hanging Gardens are gone,
like the Colossus of Rhodes;
mere ghosts in their own lands.
The resolute man never comes home.
Hunger knows no boundaries
and what might have been
his garden paradise is now a desert.
Who would recognize him?
His name fades from history
and his portrait, made when
he was young, resembles no one,
or anyone; pale green eyes,
short brown hair,
a smile shy, but beguiling

Slipping by William Reichard

A fact of summer:
it slips into autumn, sags a bit.
This was the hottest July
on record, a good excuse
to sit indoors, read books,
contemplate a shifting metabolism.
When the temperatures lift,
we move into the garden.
Of course there is wreckage.
The storms were violent this year.
The winds flattened trees,
left ostrich ferns broken.
The birdhouse in the river birch
survived, but there's no sign
of the inhabitants.
Autumn is all about cutting back.
Eating less. Growing hard and thin.
Me with my pruning shears,
a growing pile of spent flowers
and wrong branches,
a trunk full of brush for
the city compost site.
The beauty there is what
we'll find next spring:
rich black soil where
all we left was waste.

Tel – Aviv – Jafo by Jonas Specktor

the sliced half-lemon in hand
kitchen greetings
happy birthday Solomon
sea breeze in nostrils
fresh rinds spruce up the trash
smell of city streets
scraggle of cats stuck
in the apartment windows
wander the alleys
modern Bauhaus buildings
old mosques down the way
millennial dust stuck
in the nerves
cause slight glitches in the traffic and
oily coffee
wake up from afternoon siesta
feel a light rush in my belly
like a citrus tree in bloom
take a walk down to the beach where I
sit on the rocks and wait
for the Jaffa orange sun to touch the horizon,
also maybe a vision
a cool hand on my shoulder
or more wispy strands of
magnetic lichen
growing, dying
inside and around
my ache of lank limbs, laughs and sighs
the surf growls hums and will
never quiet
content for now that I can sit here with
nowhere else to be
no name for the land to call me
but a new-old
olive idea
let the wind and airplanes sign here:

*-----



Lunch Lines by Jonas Specktor

shiver and buzz
all about my skin
hum of the noon hour
at the falafel shop
I sit and try to peel my worry
like the skin of a strange new fruit
salad sits limp at the side
with potatoes, potatoes
and corn
to eat or to plant deep in thawing ground
at a loss for land and finance
the motherland calls
she sends rare taxidermied birds by air-mail
they are wrapped in delicate cellophane
and smell of attics and sandalwood
it's all in the juice of our ancestors
this waiting-room ballet,
dropped in cans
handled with slight grimaces
knowing looks
chided child
the radio offers overripe bananas
my dry hands accept
these winters are not what they used to be
though the sun hits the windshields at similar angles,
the breeze ruffles shaggy hair
in need of a trim
lackluster lunch,
still the best meal of the day,
Mr. O'hara, I concur
a chance to slip away from the dirty streets
heavy arms of the cuckoo
out under the lime green facades
that gather ice and shout down street performers
on the street of cheap gyros and haircuts,
to take a moment
remember discarded things
like twine and wooden toy blocks,

place some fragrant dust
in my front shirt pocket.
say a prayer for those pigeons
antennae all tangled in the glare
a shame, really



Nightshade by Jonas Specktor

I slip on my silk tunic,
go out into the yard to gather in
the evening harvest
my head is fittingly light
for this task
I reach the threshold of the eggplants,
ponder planting my head
into the soil beside them
what purple dreams I would have
I run my hand through my hair,
admire the suggestive curls
of basil leaves
lean over to pluck up
a few snap peas
looks like they will have
a good crunch
the last lasers of sunlight
are bleeding out
over the city
I take my snacks
back into the house and
place a jazz record
on the turntable
languid warmth of summer
milks my bones
in the kitchen
blue flames
hold the simmer of
black garlic
while outside the window
night birds sing along

Smell the Dusk by Jonas Specktor

ask the porous, perforated skin
of a fig tree:
what dance?
we swim in contested waters
a musky border lake
where the eggs we carry
crack open
spill golden blood on the
lolling water's tongue
whale watchers sing
"our inheritance is dead and dry!"
a closed harbor
man-made, holding hands
at the backroom deal
beware of the lurking Mafia,
heartbreak and oil-slick
these toxic messengers
broadcast over the white-noise highways
that stretch out
cover more of the air with their
tyrant groaning
like Sun Ra, I long for quiet space
other worlds with different frequencies
my friends make war drums from
fallen oak trees and deer hide
I tinker with the radio
try to turn it into a spaceship



Deep in the Swirl by Jonas Specktor

borne into the blood
by some elusive capillary
this churning ache for
all ribbons unbridled
for a serenade to the skin
let the bottle be uncorked
put an arch in the back
effervescing foam
brims over
sudden breath seizes us
in some ripe lagoon



Hungry Ghosts by Sharlene Teo

i.

2006. Hungry Ghost Festival. This is the year I felt my brain was a single chicken stock cube, and could accept nothing further. I spent many hours in bed, indulgently paralyzed—my ankles quite unkempt, wrinkling my forehead. No more about me. The world yawned and widened. All across the neighborhood, orange bowls and domestic vegetables clattered out in public. Whole meals left out by the side of the street. Sponge cake and gravel, congealed rice and pigeon grit, road-ridden gifts for stray ghosts. I thought of Pac Man phantoms; pleasantly harmless, nothing more or less than jagged blankets roving the street corners. The air choked with joss-stick smoke, digestible superstition. My eleven-year-old brother told me that he had seen a ghost on the long walk home. It was a woman, he reported, with a greenish face. How did you know it was a ghost, I asked. She just looked so sad, he said.

ii.

We sit perpendicular to each other. It is a Sunday. You are not a Sunday kind of girl. You get the blues on Sundays, and forget how to smile. We are in the beer garden of an overpriced pub, because of the nice weather. I hold on to a sweating glass of beer and wish I found it more pleasant to drink, that I would hurry up. Right now you are looking tired, staring out at the world. An annoying-looking couple enters the establishment. 40% of why they are annoying is because they look richer than us, with their fine-knit neutral coverings and stupid clean hair. Fragrant and unmarked: like they are prone to feeling less troubled. I want to declare that they are annoying but would rather not come off as so relentlessly, tiresomely sardonic. Maybe we are an annoying-looking couple. In my mind, fortified, I am making you laugh so hard that you are crying, as if a giant onion has halved and filled your vision.

iii.

My ex-boyfriend spent the entire time we were in Los Angeles lamenting about how he hated California and never wanted to run into fame whores or tanned people. Instead we sat around our motel room until long past noon without touching each other, and I clipped my toenails into a plastic bag from a petrol station. I asked him why he picked Los Angeles of all the cities in the world if he didn't want to partake in any Hollywood sightseeing shenanigans. He told me to Assume is to make an ASS out of U and ME and that he thought Los Angeles would be full of dusty old museums with sacred carpets and Botticelli paintings, churches with hallowed ceilings of cracked tempera and ancient effigies, tiny cafés with bitter coffees and indecipherable menus. He thought we would pose for photographs in cobblestone squares and nuzzle ferociously on wide bridges over a docile river at dusk. I told him that sounded more like a European cliché than anybody's idea of Los Angeles. He told me I was the one who was mistaken, and that after these five days were up he never wanted to see me again.

iv.

My name is Stanley and I am working on a novel, I tell the passably attractive girl at the party. She has mid-length hair and a blue leopard-printed top. From the corner of my eye, her face is fading. It bleeds out like watercolors. I could not pick her out from a police line-up, much less a lunchtime queue for limp sandwiches.

She holds a near-empty plastic cup and tries her hardest to look like she finds me interesting. I want to tell her that I try my hardest as well; I'm trying all the time. What is the novel about, my line manager asks me the next day. We work together in a greeting card chain store called HUGS. It's about a twenty-four year old male, working in a call center, I tell my line manager. Or I just made it up to impress her. He merely nods.

v.

I wish I was better at the Internet. I sit here on my ancient PC with one shoe on, late and gormless, waiting for Google to tell me the name of the Vietnamese restaurant where we are having a class reunion. It's been eleven years; half my classmates are too successful to turn up. The Internet tells me so. My screen is a silent hum of unanswered questions and garden paths of vague and almost pleasant loneliness: humdrum laundry cycles, days without.

vi.

My older aunt spent twenty years of her life wringing her hands, waiting to grow up. On her twentieth birthday, she put on a peach-colored dress, cinched at the waist, and ventured out into the inscrutable world. She still looked so young, my grandmother said, too young to know any better. Did she die? I asked. My mother slapped me for being morbid.

Back in her peach-colored dress, my aunt had her nose buried in a guidebook for a different city to the one she found herself in. What is this, where is this landmark? she muttered, accidentally kicking away stray turtles and heroin needles with her patent pumps. If you're not careful, you'll miss the boat, everyone had warned her. So she kept on walking until she reached the harbor. Bone-dry for miles out. They were reclaiming land, dredging the seabed up until it reached her chin. There the city council would build sticky bright apartment buildings and convenience stores that sold cigarettes and milk. My aunt touched her own smooth forehead; she would not miss the boat.