

inkslinger

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2018-2019

Editor's Note | **05**

FICTION

<i>Brother</i>	20	Brendon Sylvester
<i>It Was the Third Friday of the Month</i>	34	Kaleigh Carrier
<i>Agnes</i>	48	Lindsay Lewis
<i>Something Human</i>	60	Hannah Dietze
<i>The Parting Glass</i>	72	Brian Brooks

Editor Spotlights —

POETRY

Micah Hogan	07	<i>Theosis</i>
Rachel Surgalski	10	<i>racoon</i>
Leah Vanderheiden	11	<i>petals, thorns, and light</i>
Brutus	12	<i>Port Meadow</i>
Emily Bontrager	17	<i>A Mosquito's Brain</i>
Micah Hogan	28	<i>Invisible Fish</i>
Alea Peister	31	<i>Sister</i>
David M. Giles	40	<i>Disjointed Asbestos Prayer</i>
Alea Peister	42	<i>Nativity</i>
Eden Theule	44	<i>Reflections on Chronic Migraine</i> —
Alea Peister	54	<i>Social Consciousness</i>
Rachel Surgalski	56	<i>7901 walker street, la plama, ca 90623</i>
Emily Bontrager	59	<i>A Small Child</i>
Lexi Yates	64	<i>The Problem</i>
Brianna Clark	66	<i>Peach Pit</i>
Brendon Sylvester	80	<i>Salton</i>
Brutus	82	<i>Lazarus</i>

ART

<i>open</i>	06	Nina Vuletic
<i>daily, daily</i>	08	Nina Vuletic
<i>monochrome dreams</i>	16	Leah Vanderheiden
<i>winter dream</i>	18	Tori Tateishi
<i>brothers</i>	26	Nina Vuletic
<i>vwolf</i>	27	Rachel Surgalski
<i>tender</i>	30	Rachel Surgalski
<i>hands</i>	32	Nina Vuletic
<i>inner collision</i>	40	Tori Tateishi
<i>chair</i>	43	Rachel Surgalski
— <i>Animated Lights Series No. 3</i>	44	Trisha Porter
<i>francis</i>	46	Rachel Surgalski
<i>a featherless biped</i>	47	Alec Buzzetta
— <i>Finding Space</i>	54	Caleb Raney
<i>window</i>	57	Rachel Surgalski
<i>Talk about it</i>	58	Abbey Harmon
<i>plate</i>	65	Rachel Surgalski
<i>wittenburg</i>	68	Kindra Sophia Soto
<i>Solitude</i>	69	Abbey Harmon
<i>Restful Restfulness</i>	70	Abbey Harmon
<i>take me home</i>	78	Tori Tateishi
<i>untitled</i>	81	Tori Tateishi

EDITOR'S NOTE

Somewhere in a box in my family's house, there is a tape of my mom asking my sister and I what we wanted to be when we grew up. My sister had a list that included a chef and a flight attendant and an animal doctor. My list had only one item: I wanted to be an artist.

But then I grew up. And the term "artist" became something I felt inadequate to bear. I was "and art major," "an english minor," "a creative" if I absolutely had to be, but never an artist. Because how could I be *an artist* when there were people like Flannery O'Connor, Sally Mann, and T.S. Eliot—not to mention all the great and famous masters in whose footsteps they follow.

I will never be one of the great artists.

Most of the people on these pages will never be one of the greats either. But it is not only the greats who make great work, who bring to light meaningful moments, forge unforeseen connections, or reveal truths about who we, as humans, are or are meant to be.

The work in this book has been made by young people who see the world—its mountains and oceans, its bodies (our bodies), even its laws of gravity—as something worthy to be written about or drawn or photographed. The work in this book exhibits insight and skill and commitment to craft. The work in this book makes me believe that maybe it's not recognition or fame that makes one an artist. Maybe it's just the seeing, the making, and the sharing.

Thank you for letting us share this work with you.

— SAGE BOVEN THEULE

AND THE TEAM:

Eden Theule (*VP + event coordinator*)

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Hannah Dietze, Joshua Flores, Sarah Elizabeth Jones, Jehn Kubiak, Melanie Ortiz, Trisha Porter.



Theosis

Micah Hogan

*"I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'
I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'"*

-Ezekiel 16:6b

We are the baited breath of the diver
Before the full immersion, body and soul
Into the dance and the cleansing chlorine
Caught in the negative space exactly center
In a piss yellow sea on a perfectly poised level.

We are the tension between image and
Likeness, living and life. A moment of divine
Collection in creation. But as the Word
Sounds again resounds again the reflection
Steps out of the mirror and joins with
Consubstantial lungs the art of breathing.

open — Nina Vuletic



Nina Vuletic

daily, daily

raccoon

Rachel Surgalski

i found you—belly swollen, mouth
dripping wet with gnats, half-buried
in the sandy overgrowth
at the edge of via del sol.
eyes turned out, gold and running
like raw yolk, fur damp like you've
been licked over, tenderly. skull punched
in, your face is twisted like a
pinwheel, and i could almost
mistake a smile turning the corner
of your lip—your yellow teeth
bright, glistening like stars.

petals, thorns, and light

Leah Vanderheiden

petals, thorns, and light-
light dancing on the page

in between bleeding words
filled to the brim with joy and pain
manifestations that will go unheard.
ink dripping off the lines
smeared with tears and tea,
bleeding words turn to dust
chambered behind lock and key.
pressed in between pages- lay flowers,
so i am not consumed
to hide away my thorns,
to immortalize all my wounds.
the flowers bear petals,
that overcome the spines
my heart can be found in these leaves,
but flowers picked won't remain alive
only words shall be left of me
once i've been swept up by the sky

few or none will ever see-
my bleeding words entangled with

petals, thorns, and light.

Port Meadow

—
Brutus

I.

Far beyond our petty quarrels,
Past our jostled moneybags,
Some silent, sudden shadow planet
Crests its orbits evermore.

II.

The rain clouds form their congregations
Wrapped like ribbons round the hill—
Saviour to this Desolation's
Field of thirsty daffodils.
Twain sierras, purpled peaks,
Together merge their sloping peels.
Betwixt their monumental vale,
The moon his buttery sphere reveals.

III.

Round the barren, boundless waste,
I take my pensive, silent stroll.
Yonder grassy, pastured acres
Bear the imprint of my sole.
It comes to me in snatching seconds—
Worlds unnumbered, lands beyond;
The hope my dreams are more than flowers
Wilting in the sun that's dawned.
There's a place beyond the leas,
Beyond the rim of urban sprawl.
Unvexed by bulging pewter smokestacks—
On the green side of the garden wall.

IV.

Do you recall when we were young?
Forty winters hath this world endured
And I was young and you were young.
But the stars were a cacophony of screeching voices:
The Choice was born,
The Chance was not,
And Courage was an alien thing.
For cupid's shattered quiver lay
Somewhere yonder.
Moldy, barren, bare, and bleeding
Broken on the Themsen lea.
Some fools fish to feed their families.
Others fish for sport.

V.

We keep spinning around
At breakneck speed,
And when we stop, we die.

VI.

Beyond the shattered altars of
 A darkened world that never was,
 Your ill-loosed lines
 Bend like a bloody sickle
 To fickle fate's throat:
 "We were just a
 Snag on the wings of destiny,
 A paper bandage for something immortal."

VII.

Saith the One who walketh with me in the cool of
 the day:
 "It is not good that the man should be alone."
 And then He leaves.

VIII.

Oh how we struggle against ourselves,
 Flailing in stark defiance!
 But in the end, we always win.

IX.

I am a spy behind the lines.
 I win with words and shallow smiles
 And pray that laughter might disguise
 The fear and loathing in my heart.

X.

I've seen forked tongues of blazing fire,
 Men crouched round in skins of sheep.
 Their talk's of wine, wassail, and women
 Some thatched village in the deep.
 In the dark-enveloped, brooding night,
 The sun enjoys the boon of sleep.
 In the Temples of their Paradise
 The lights grow dim and pontiffs weep.
 Such things seem right to men,
 For whom silence is anathema

XI.

And yet the Engine of the world turns on-
 Despite my gyrations to the contrary.

XII.

Methinks I heard within the wind,
 The whimper of a bleating flock
 Of flapping moon-crazed Brecon geese
 On yonder lapping riverbank
 Embrace the silent smiles that
 The pomp of pageantry despised.
 I stretch my idle, pacing feet
 And point my gaze beyond the stars
 To shoot the orbits of this world
 And glimpse the boundless mind of God!



monochrome dreams

Leah Vanderheiden

A Mosquito's Brain

Emily Bontrager

Friends talking over a meal,
With their bowls and cups
And plates and spoons.
A sip of water, a bite of soup
Between their conversation.
They've been talking about the brain,
truly fascinating!
I look down to eat my oats
And in the gooey milk,
I see a mosquito has drowned,
I wonder to myself,
Just how big is a mosquito's brain?



Brother

Brendon Sylvester

The streetlamps bathed the parking lot in a haze of orange light. It was early in the morning—the buzz of the Cig Zone sign was the night's only sound. Mike sat up in his sleeping bag, brushing his fingers through his yellowing hair. He smelled his old Tom Petty T-shirt; it probably had another day left in it. He pulled his dad's old guitar out of its case, covered in stickers from all the different states and concerts Mike had been to. His favorite was from the ninety-four Woodstock. It said "2 More days of Peace & Music." He walked to the middle of the lot and strummed a chord. It sounded good. He burst into the opening of "Brother" by Lord Huron, breaking the silence by singing,

"Don't turn away! Don't tell me that we're not the same! We'll face the fire together, brothers till the end."

He eased off into the verse:

"How long have I known you, brother?"

Hundreds of miles... Thousands of years..."

He wasn't homeless while he sang. As long as his hands kept moving, his eyes screwed shut, and his throat throbbed with the music, he was part of it. He saw his old college days again, that backpacking trip in the Mojave with Jack Simshaw and Yellow. They sang songs by the Steve Miller band and smoked Serengeti from the old pipe Jack had brought along.

The night got later, but he didn't stop playing. He couldn't handle lying quietly in his sleeping bag by himself sometimes. So, he sang until the sky got light and his throat got sore. Then, he walked back to his little alleyway between the Vons and the Chase and tried to sleep until the sun came up

The sunlight was annoyingly bright. He was really sweaty—it was way too hot to be early anymore. Eleven at the earliest. He smelled his shirt again. Disgusting. He peeled it off and switched it with a fresher one. This one said, "I like big blunts and I cannot lie," but it was so faded you could barely even read it anymore. He picked up his guitar case and walked through the alley to his usual spot in front of the grocery store. He started tuning the guitar and left the empty case in front of him so people could throw money in. He put a couple bills in himself—that usually guilted people into being more generous.

A chubby white lady with brown hair and a sky-blue turtleneck walked from her white minivan right by him. She was making an obvious effort not to notice him, and she clutched her purse a bit tighter when she passed. He hated those types the most. He started playing the acoustic version of "I Had Sex With My Dog," hoping to spite her if she came back out, but it didn't work.

He saw a faded gold Ford pull up. A Mexican lady with a couple of boys, probably five and seven, got out.

"Para bailar la bamba..." he started singing. It was the only Spanish song he knew, but she didn't acknowledge him. He kept playing it because he couldn't stand to just play the first few bars of a song. The people who passed by him slowly became a blur. He didn't remember many of them. An old guy who smelled like he smoked tossed him a quarter for playing "Won't Back Down" by Tom Petty. Very generous of him. The next two, probably stay-at-home moms, didn't look at him. Pricks. An older couple gave him twenty while he was playing Elvis, though. That was nice.

When the mid-morning rush died down, he noticed a lanky white kid in a striped white v-neck—probably about sixteen—ride up on his bike. He started playing, "Hey there Delilah, what's it like in New York City..." He

hated that song. It didn't even matter; the kid was wearing earbuds and walked right past him, which made Mike feel even worse for playing it at all. Once the kid was inside, there was a dead spell where no one walked in or out and Mike had some solitude.

After making sure no one was there, he started playing "Walk" by Blind Melon. It was one of the best songs he knew on guitar, but he never played it to beg. That song was his—if he played it for the stupid people who thought he was barely worth a quarter he'd hate it. After that he played "Three Rounds and a Sound" by Blind Pilot and "Runnin' on Empty" by Jackson Browne when he saw out of the corner of his eye that someone was watching him. That was usually a good sign, so he just kept playing. Once he finished the song, the kid who'd passed him earlier put twelve dollars in the guitar case.

"You're pretty good. I wish I had more cash on me."

Mike shook his head. "All good, man. Thankful for whatever you can. You go to Caesar Chavez? Sylmar?"

"Nah, I graduated. I'm going to Mission now."

Mike nodded. Mission had a nice campus for a JC. He'd slept there a couple times, but the police didn't like homeless men on college campuses.

"I totally would have pegged you as a high school student. Probably 'cause I'm so old. Huh." There was a gap in the conversation for two seconds. "How old are you?"

"Nineteen. Twenty next week."

"Well, happy birthday."

The kid chuckled. "Thanks."

Mike thought for a second and whistled. "Nineteen. You're lucky, man. Got your whole life ahead of you. Don't waste it, man. Don't waste it."

The kid cocked his head at him. "Thanks. I'll... try." He paused for a second,

turning his head towards his bike. Mike was about to say "bye" when the kid asked, "Hey, this is... do you take requests?"

"Don't usually get 'em. What's your name?"

"Jack."

"I'm Mike. Had good buddy named Jack, when I was your age."

"Yeah?"

"Oh yeah. Got into tons of crazy shit with that guy."

Jack laughed and Mike liked him. He sat up.

"Well, Jack, what's your request? If it's from the 60s or 70s, I probably know it."

"You were playing Blind Pilot just now, though!"

"You know them?" Mike shook his head. "They're all right. I worked in a record shop couple years ago and picked up some of their stuff, but them, Lord Huron, and Greg Isakov are about the only new music I like. I know most stuff from 60s or 70s, though. "Want to sit down?" he asked. Jack sat down—a couple feet away from him, but he still did it. He kind of looked like his Jack, now that he thought about it. Same brown hair, only shorter. Same lanky build. He just needed a lime T-shirt and blue-tinted shades.

"Alright. Whatcha got for me, Jack?"

"Listen to the music?"

"HA!" Mike slapped the guitar. "Good choice." He started playing, getting into it this time.

"Don't you feel it growing day by day

People getting ready for the news

Some are happy, some are sa-a-ad

Oh, we gotta let the music play.”

Mike felt like he was part of the music again, but Jack was with him this time. He remembered walking up a small street in North Hollywood, when he'd only been on the streets a couple weeks. He only had his guitar and his clothes. It was pretty hot, which in LA was the real problem with not having shelter—you'd dehydrate or get heatstroke. He looked at the business card in his hand and at the number on the house in front of him. He was on the right street, definitely. A really nice one. It wasn't Beverly Hills or anything, but a house on the corner had at least two stories and a guest house. Most of the others were less nice, but he saw a couple with pools, and the whole street was symmetrically lined with liquid amber trees. Almost every lawn was. Oh, here it was. 14735. He stood there a good ten minutes trying to decide if he should knock. Jack had called him his brother. He'd help, right? He only needed a place to stay a couple weeks, then he'd be out.

That was when they were in college, though. What if Jack didn't see them as friends anymore? He'd told him to call, but stay with him? Still, he had to. He closed his eyes and rang the doorbell. There was movement inside. At least he wouldn't have to do this again.

The door opened and a tall, black-haired lady in a white blouse answered.

“I'm really—is Jack there?” he asked, humiliated.

She stared at him for a couple more seconds, probably surprised that her husband was friends with a homeless man.

“Um... yeah, I'll get—hold on.” She shut the door. It was full two minutes before Jack showed up. He looked blankly at him and asked,

“May I help you?”

Jack didn't recognize him. They stared at each other a couple of seconds, and all of a sudden Mike realized he couldn't do it. He couldn't tell his best friend he'd ever had that he'd lost everything and needed his help, he couldn't ask Jack to let him stay in his house and scare the hell out of his family—he couldn't admit that this worthless drifter in front of him was his best friend once. He looked at the floor and said,

“Sorry—wrong house.”

“Are you alright? Do you need anything? Food or anything?” Jack asked.

Mike shook his head. “Nah I'm good. Have a good day, man,” he mumbled.

“Yeah, you too,” said Jack, obviously confused.

Mike walked away.

“Whoa-oh-oh, listen to the music,

Whoa-oh-oh, listen to the music,

All the time.”

Mike strummed the last chord and sang it loudly. Jack did too. The kid had surprised him. He sang along the whole time.

Mike nodded at him and said, “Man, you're good!”

“Thanks. I was in a band for a bit in high school. Pretty bad, but I liked it.”

Mike nodded, smiling, then stopped. He thought for a second. “It was your birthday last week, right?”

“Next week.”

Mike nodded. He opened his mouth for a second, closed it, then took all the cash from his case. “Here,” he said, handing it to Jack. He looked really confused, so Mike said,

“It's a birthday gift, man. Take it.”

Jack frowned at him.

“Look. I know you don't want to take money from a homeless man, but you've gotta take it. I've gotta do this. And—and promise me something, alright? You've got to promise you won't waste your life. Don't do drugs or any of that shit. Get a good life while you still can, alright, Jack?”

Jack's face cleared a little. He nodded, and he looked at Mike like he understood him. Then he smiled, took out exactly twelve dollars, and put them

back.

“You keep that. You deserve it. Also, thanks. I wish I could do more.”

“You can,” said Mike.

Jack laughed, then his face grew serious. He looked at Mike again. “Yeah. I will,” he said. Then he smiled, put his earbuds in, walked to his bike, and waved as he rode away. Mike waved back and teared up a little. Jack seemed like a good kid—hopefully things would go better for him. He picked up his guitar and started singing again,

“How long have I known you, brother? Hundreds of miles. Thousands of years...”



Rachel Surgalski

vwolf



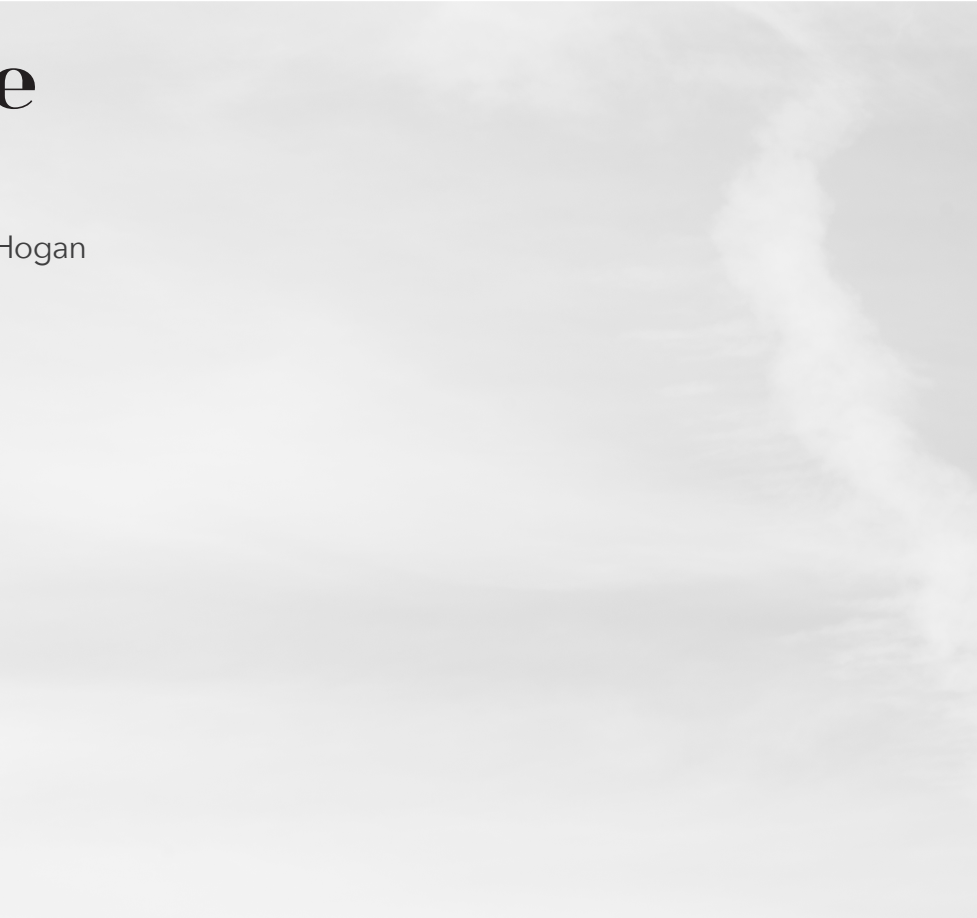
Nina Vuletic

brothers

Invisible Fish

————— Micah Hogan

The invisible fish are caught
In Quantum intransaction
As they swim across
The Great Barrier Reef
The isness of the water
Is precipitated on
The backward bend of tail.
And the translucent scales
Are scaled in pigmentation
By the eye of an invisible
Beholder. Behold. The fish
Find ground in being and
Their being finds ground
As they crawl up and out
Of the sea. And there
Shall be no sea.
None of us can see
At the beginning, as
We are seen and are. Be.





Sister

—
Alea Peister

I sit next to you
remember you.
I feel
like a canyon
lies between us.

O, love –

the thought of you is terrible
and lovely
on that cliff top's
jagged edge



Nina Vuletic

hands

It was the Third Friday of the month

—
Kaleigh Carrier

That particular day had become a routine. I would wake up before dawn and dress in that button down shirt you liked, because you always said that tee shirts were sloppy and the sign of an unorganized mind. The bus across town would leave at 6:20 give or take, even though the bus driver takes pride in his ‘punctuality.’ I think you would like him. He’s a little crotchety, but he shares your love for stories. I guess he gets a lot, with the amount of people who come and go on his bus every day from Main Street to Cedar Lane.

That’s where I would get off. Cedar Lane. It’s two miles from where you are and I could catch another bus and save my energy. But it’s nice to be able to walk in the silent mornings before everyone gets up for work, before the noise and the movement of the day takes over. I would venture through two neighborhoods, the kind with overgrown grass and chipped paint and ‘Beware of Dog’ signs on every side gate. The sun would be rising by the time I reached the Miller house.

The only reason I know who owns the house is because they painted their last name on their mailbox, in block letters with a steady hand. The

paint was old, fading from exposure to the sun, but the words were still legible. I always liked that mailbox. It has a kind of character that was absent from the rest of the street—old and rusting, but still sturdy.

Under the Miller’s mailbox would be an assortment of wildflowers. Greens and blues, purples and yellows. And I know you wouldn’t approve, but they’re your favorite. So, I would pick a bundle, pull them up from their roots, and continue on my way. I would walk until I reached the place you were, and I would stay for a while. Sometimes, I would sit with you for hours. Other times, I would show up and spend mere moments with you before leaving. But I would come.

And that was the way the third Friday of every month went. That’s the way it’s always went for as long as you’ve been there. That’s the way I thought it would go that day.

It started as it always did: wake up, button down shirt, bus, Cedar Lane, walk until the sun rises, pick the wildflowers from the Miller’s lawn. And then my day changed.

Her name was Jane, and as I stood in her garden red handed with the brown soil of her flowers, I could think of nothing else but how I would be late to see you. She bounded out of her house with a determined step, red curls flying in every which way. She had me in her sights.

“So, you’re the mystery thief!” Excitement was not the expression I would expect to see on someone that was being stolen from. Yet her grin was wide, as if the prospect of someone stealing from her was the beginning of some grand adventure.

“I... I didn’t...” I tried to explain. You know my way with words, especially when caught off guard. The beginning of a laugh was playing on her face, and she made no attempt to hide it. A tilt of the head. A quirk of the mouth.

“So, is she pretty?” She had a childlike quality to her voice, like the tinkling of a bell. Not sure what she was trying to ask. I didn’t respond, instead wondering if this kind of theft was enough to warrant a call to

the police and trying to recall the name of that one lawyer I had met on the bus a few weeks back.

“The girl,” She laughed. Did she never stop laughing? “I hope she’s pretty if you keep bringing her all my flowers.”

Something in my head finally clicked. She was trying to get me to apologize, to grovel and attempt to make amends. I was more than happy to. Anything to avoid the humiliation of getting thrown in the brig for flower theft. I would be the laughingstock of the jail block. I would have to get tough looking tattoos to compensate for my lack of a reputation. God, I hate tattoos.

“I am so sorry.” I said emphatically. “I have no right, I wasn’t thinking... I didn’t—” Her hand on my shoulder cut me off.

“Calm down, mystery man. I don’t bite.” She waved away my apology, and I began to wonder if I was still in imminent danger. She was sizing me up, I could tell. Maybe trying to see if I was the ruthless lawbreaker the flowers in my hand suggested I was.

“I’m coming with you.” In spite of my sputtered protests and apparent confusion, she plowed on. “You’ve been taking the flowers from my lawn once a month; I’m coming with you to see if this girl is pretty enough to warrant flower theft.”

I tried to explain, I really did. I tried to tell her about you and how it wasn’t like she thought, but the words were stuck in my throat and somehow, someway, she took that as an agreement. It appeared a bargain was struck. I show her the ‘pretty girl’ to whom I was giving her flowers to, and she would turn a blind eye to my past crimes.

The girl grabbed my hand that wasn’t holding the flowers and dragged me towards my usual route with a ‘you go this way, right?’ thrown carelessly over her shoulder. My feet followed even though my mind protested. How to explain?

I should’ve told her then, gathered my courage and just spat out the

words. But they wouldn’t come. They were buried somewhere in the depths of my chest, pounding as they tried to find a way out, or at least they must’ve been because I couldn’t think of another reason that my chest would be so tight.

My lack of speaking didn’t mean that we walked in silence though. The girl made sure of that. In an uninterrupted flow, she gave me her life story. Her name was Jane. She had lived in that house since she was a little girl, but she always wanted to move to a big city and get a little flat and a job in a big company. She enjoyed the night and stayed up late most of the time, which is why it took her so long to notice that the flowers were missing. The past few months, though, she had started taking classes at the local community college in the morning—biotech—and so she had to be up and out at sunrise. The gap in the bed of flowers had then become more noticeable to her, and she started charting when they would disappear until she had pinpointed the pattern. From there, she laid in wait until she spotted me. She was a natural Cam Jansen.

“At least tell me something about her.” Jane turned to me in an earnest way, red curls jumping over her shoulder in her excitement. “Just one thing.”

“She’s beautiful.” I complied. It wasn’t a lie.

Jane gave a small smile, more sincere than the other ones she had flashed my way, more personal. We walked in a comfortable silence from then on out. The tightness in my chest had disappeared, replaced by a calm that I rarely felt anymore. And we walked. And walked. She didn’t question the direction or the length of time but instead was content on enjoying the moment. I can only guess what was going through her head.

We neared the place where you are and my steps slowed. I wasn’t sure how she was going to react but I wasn’t worried. I had the feeling that she would understand.

We reached the entrance. I stopped. Her curious and playful gaze fell on me in a silent question. I said nothing, letting her come to the realiza-

tion herself. It took less time than I thought it would. I expected her to ask me aloud why I stopped and where she was and what I was doing. I expected to have to explain. I expected her embarrassment, her pity.

But that didn't happen. Jane, as surprising and baffling as ever, seemed to have understood in a moment what took me weeks to come to terms with. Her eyes went wide as she shifted her gaze from me to the sign on the gate beside us back to me again. Her mouth thinned into a single line and her eyes closed. A hand on my shoulder. A silent apology and condolence. Not a word was said.

Instead she linked her arm through mine and allowed me to lead her to you, the pretty girl for whom I stole flowers.

The floor was decorated with floral arrangements of different kinds, albeit most likely not stolen ones—I have to find some way to make you feel special. The solemn visitors didn't stray from their groups, stuck in their own heads and ignoring the rest of the world. We leaned on one another as we walked, drawing strength from the presence of the other. I had never been here with another person since that day, that first third Friday of the month. It was nice to have someone to draw silent comfort from.

At last we reached you, and I introduced my friend, Jane, to you. I told you that she was going to move to a big city someday, and get a flat close to the biotech company she would work at. I told you that she was a night owl but had made a special exception to get up early to see you.

She talked to you too, another unexpected surprise that wasn't so unexpected. She told you that she enjoyed talking to me. She told you that she knew that I came to see you every month and that I was a great listener. She told you I was a good person...

We stood there for some time, talking to you and about you. I told her how you used to go to book releases, meet authors of obscure books, and compliment them on their work. I told her how you used to dance and sing off key all the time. How it used to bug me a million years ago,

but now whenever I watch one of those old videos it makes me happier than anything else. I told her how you once taught a random teenager how to parallel park at the beach and how you would keep bags of socks, granola bars, and water bottles in the back of your car for any homeless person you would meet. I told her about how you would get so angry if someone spoiled a story and would laugh louder than anyone else at the stupidest jokes.

It was some time before I walked Jane back to her house in a comfortable silence. We said goodbye and when she walked towards her door, she didn't look back--not once.

I rarely saw her again, and when I did, she would greet me with the same exuberant smile and adventurous tone that she had the time she caught me stealing flowers from her garden.

I once pondered if I should change my route to get to you on those Fridays but decided against it, knowing that Jane wouldn't hold it against me, but that I would have to buy your flowers from the store from then on.

Of course, I was wrong. Jane, always defying expectations, gave me one last surprise. The next time I passed by the Miller house on the way to visit you, there was a sign by the flowers in the same block letters that decorated the mailbox. It read, "for mom." I smiled and picked your flowers.

Disjointed Asbestos Prayer

David M. Giles

Till the right time
Comes anew
Or God pours me out
A glass full of old wine
When is there a time I can really
Learn You?

Nativity

—
Alea Peister

Mary
clasps him to her
anguished body,
wipes

a bloody thumb
across
his brow,
his eyes.

He eats of her.
His skin
is smeared

with amniotic fluid,
place.

chair

—
Rachel Surgalski



editor spotlight:

Reflections on Chronic Migraine

Eden Theule

Some days the
Heaviness
On my skull is
As a hand around
An eggshell.

Phone calls
Prescriptions
Neurologists
Ocean murals
On doctors'
office walls.

Do trees live in this world,
Dying and dying and dying,
Falling after every spring,
To learn how to turn, to burn
In celestial gold and scarlet?

Pain and
Blood tests
In sterilized tubes
Seem inconsistent
With the grand
Normalcy of
Life,
Seem out of keeping
With a Moon
So cold and smooth
I could melt it
On my tongue,
And a paper bag
Of satsumas and
Scarlet persimmons
On my floor.

I must reconcile
All these in my body

editor spotlight: Trisha Porter

Animated Lights Series No.3



editor spotlight:

Reflections on Chronic Migraine

 Eden Theule

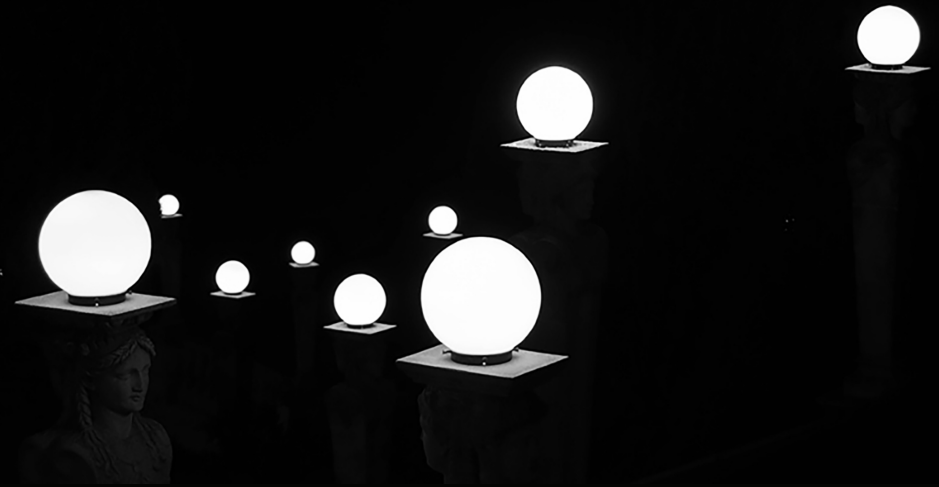
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*editor spotlight:* Trisha Porter

Animated Lights Series No.3



francis

Rachel Surgalski



a featherless biped

Alec Buzzetta

Agnes

Lindsay Lewis

I worked at Duncan & Partners for six years, with Agnes McCormick there for the four in the middle. I wish I could say that this was just a coincidence, but the stupid truth was that when I was hired, I planned to move on to bigger and better things within three years at most. I didn't realize that Agnes would become the biggest and best thing that could've happened to me. I really only stayed that extra year after her to convince myself that my prolonged relationship with Duncan & Partners was, in fact, independent of her.

I remember the day she started. She had this weird contrast going on: she looked like a fairy with a thin, ethereal frame, rosy cheeks, and silky, red hair, but she wore a turquoise velvet pantsuit with big shoulder pads that seemed to weigh her down. She dressed like that every day - like some kind of 80s business lady. I remember hearing one of the other girls in the office ask her why she dressed like that. She said it made her feel powerful. She had these lilac pleated pants that she called her "fancy pants." That made me laugh.

I didn't think much of her the first day, but she grew on me pretty quick. She walked up to my cubicle on her second day, a mad ball of excitement and eccentricity. She introduced herself, then asked me for my name.

"James Donaldson," I replied with a handshake. After that, she asked me what my spirit animal was. I said it would probably be a vole.

"What?!" she replied with a big smile, shaking her head. "You're not a vole!"

"Oh, yeah, then what do you think I am?" I responded.

"Well, definitely not a vole. You're way too large to be a vole... what are you, '6'3?' '6'2.'" That was only the first time I came up short (quite literally) on Agnes.

She gave it a few second of thought. She studied my face, her green eyes darting around the big, unassuming mass that is me, figuring me out. "You'd be a doe, I think."

"You mean a deer?"

"No, a doe specifically. Sorry, that's not supposed to be offensive," she still had that really big smile and sort of laughed the words out, but then she got really sincere. "You just have this quiet protectiveness. You don't like when your plans are interrupted. And you're, like, kinda lanky." The smile was back.

"What?!" I said, a little offended, but mostly amused. She was a single, neon laser light in my beige-and-grey world, and I was thankful for her. The neon 80s lady suits suddenly seemed to fit her perfectly now.

"Well, I'd better get back. I probably shouldn't start slacking off on my second day," she said, gliding away from my cubicle.

"Oh, right. Sure."

"Yeah. Give it, like, two weeks."

"Oh?"

"Then I can start slacking off."

"Oh, haha, yeah."

"Bye," she ended, chuckling, then finally disappearing from view.

Huh. I kind of liked Agnes. As the days went by, I kept waiting for her to come back to my desk. I thought over what we could talk about. Maybe I'd ask about her spirit animal. Maybe I could look up some arbitrary

current event to share with her. Maybe we could start a thing where we share fun facts with each other every day. Maybe our conversations would be so engaging and so fun that I could ask her out. Maybe we'd just keep having engaging, fun conversations until we were just so engaged that we had to get married.

As the days went by, I really liked Agnes.

I should've just gone up to her desk, but it seemed too late now. What would I even say? "Hey, it's me, Jame--the doe guy from like a week ago. Remember me? Probably not... but, uh, I just wanted to tell you... I just found out there are only three ATMs in Antarctica."

No, I needed her to come to me. I needed to know that she saw something in me that was worth her time. I didn't want to bother her. Cowering idiot that I am, I just waited for her. I had a back-row ticket to watch her flutter around the office, drifting away from me. From afar, I saw her flirt with buddies of mine that I started to unfairly resent. My heart dropped when she'd rush out of the office on her lunch break--off to a place only known by whatever god she prayed to.

On a real day, when the real Agnes had been working at Duncan & Partners for four years and the imaginary Agnes had been living in my head for the same length of time (minus two days), we both ended up in the break room at the same time. This almost never happened. She was sitting on the table, picking at some Cheeto puffs in a plastic bag, entertaining the women surrounding her.

"So, anyway, I'm getting emails about alligator snapping turtles almost every day now," she giggled as she twirled a Cheeto puff near her lips, but never quite let it touch them. How I envied that Cheeto puff.

I opened the fridge, using the door to shield my face. I hadn't seen her for this long and this closely in weeks. I avoided her most of the time because I didn't know how to be around her anymore. Imaginary Agnes had shared so many intimate secrets with me, had called me her best

friend for so long, that I had to rewire myself to see Real Agnes as an acquaintance. It was weird seeing her here, a real person. I noticed humanity in her that Imaginary Agnes never had. Her sparkling eyes weren't immune to the encumbering, purple circles that exhaustion brings. Her ethereal figure lent itself to boniness and angularity.

"Hey!" she called out to me from the table.

I peaked over the top of the fridge to give her a half-smile and a nod.

"You interested in buying an alligator snapping turtle?" she added. An eruption of laughter spewed from the ladies surrounding her.

I scrambled for some clever retort. "Actually, I think I'm good," I replied with the animation of a limp lettuce head.

"Oh, okay. Because I know a guy." More laughter.

I chuckled too, but mostly to release my nerves. I tried to orient my thoughts on the Lean Cuisine bowl I was heating up. That's right. Agnes who? I'm just making some microwaveable broccoli stir fry. Onlookers probably thought that friggin' Lean Cuisine bowl was a snake charmer, and I was a snake.

"Oh, you know what?" Agnes said across the room. I perked up, even though she wasn't talking to me. It was just an instinct. "I have a call I really need to take outside. I'll be back in just a second."

Once she was gone, one of the girls exclaimed, "Oh my gosh, she's so funny. Snapping turtles?!" and wiped laughter tears from her eyes.

Another woman, wearing glasses and a pinstriped suit, got up to throw away her sandwich bag. "Oh, the trash is full. Whose turn is it to take out the trash?"

"Uh, mine, I think," I answered, because it was the truth. "I'll take it out when I finish." I carried the trash down two flights of stairs to the back entrance. Once I got down there, I was met by something I never--even in my most obscure fantasies--expected to meet. Slumped up against

the brick wall that encased Duncan & Sons, void of feeling and color and spunk, Agnes McCormick prepared a line of coke on a large hand mirror.

She looked over at me when I came out. The sparkle that her eyes usually held was replaced with a restless guilt—fear, even. Those eyes weren't the same ones I'd spent so long imagining, admiring. This wasn't Agnes. This wasn't happening.

There were so many things I wanted to do in that moment. The first was to wrap her up in my arms and just hold her. Tell her how fantastic she was. I wanted to ask her how long this had been going on, if she'd been getting help, that I was there for her if she needed me. But I didn't do any of those things. I gave her a half-sympathetic half-smile, nodded, then took out the trash and avoided eye contact.

A few days passed, and I still didn't do anything. Every time I saw Agnes, that brick wall and that mirror and the purple shadows under her eyes came back to me in a supercut. It mingled with my visions of Imaginary Agnes and she shattered. I couldn't see any Agnes, real or imaginary, as an unpolluted spark of joy. It made me realize that that was where my infatuation with her rested. I realized, without that, I didn't know if I really loved her. How sick is that? But it made her a person. One I could talk to. And on Thursday night, exactly a week after the incident, I decided I would finally, for the first time in four years, talk to her.

Then, on Friday, she didn't come in to work. And on Sunday, while browsing Facebook, I found out why. In black, insensitive San Francisco font: "Remember Agnes McCormick." I wanted to cry for her. I guess she'd been doing drugs for a while. Maybe she felt lonely and needed someone to talk to about more than just spirit animals and email scams. I wondered what would've happened if I'd have talked to her last week. I wondered what would've happened if I'd have just gone up to her damn desk that first week I met her. Maybe she wanted me to find her outside that day. Maybe she'd been waiting for me all those years, and I let her down. But probably not. I guess I'd never know.



Abbey Harmon — *Solitude*

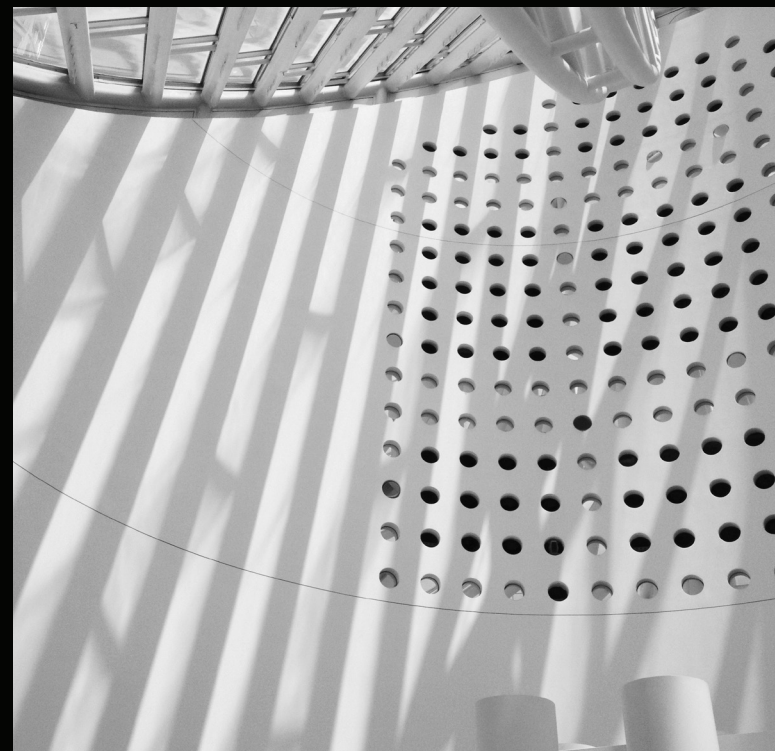


Abbey Harmon
Restful Restfulness

7901 walker street, la plama, ca 90623

— Rachel Surgalski

his scrubs are as blue
and as thin
as origami paper.
the halogens are
buzzing, he is folding
my skin
in his hands, folding the blood
back in
like a letter—creased,
crammed tight
into a too-small
one-size-fits-all
envelope.
my leg is limp over
the white butcher's paper,
and it is split into a trench
at the knee, which is
packed with anemone
and coral and
wild salmon, all wriggling
and red and full
of life.
someone else's heartbeat
is bleating
from behind the teal
curtain, and my eyes are full
of saline solution and
glass.
he licks the wound
closed
with a needle and some fishing line.



window

—

Rachel Surgalski

Social Consciousness

— Alea Peister —

Physics is trying to find
what it means to exist
and by extension of this question
what we are.

In the fog of what little is seen
the seekers discern that we—
that all reality—
are interactions between particles.

Last night, my TV told some stories.
The characters
clad in blue and red
did not love one another.
They hated each other.

This too
is interaction.

editor spotlight:

Caleb Raney
Finding Space



The Problem

Lexi Yates

The problem with poets is that they see a rose petal fall off a
 winter-bitten thorn-bush and call it a
 butterfly
 then go chasing it down the street,
 or scream about it till you come look
 The problem with poets is that they love the best of things—like
 wine-reds and velvet and dry leaves and
 finger painting and garden dirt
 Appearances be damned, they'll enjoy it with
 or without you
 But they'll never be able to hold onto it for long
 (difficult when you're positively drowning in it)
 The problem with poets is they don't feed themselves very well.
 The problem with poets is
 that it only takes a very short thing to set them off
 like
 an oil slick footprint
 blackberry stained fingertips lips
 the courtship of beetles
 and that chip on your front tooth that you'd like to forget
 Then they're mostly uncontrollable.
 Don't forget to catch them, won't you?
 We're running rather low.



plate

Rachel Surgalski

editor spotlight:

Something Human

Hannah Dietze

Risa would yell at me for taking the back way. “You’ll slip and fall going down that hill in the rain and no one will find you because you’ll be stuck unconscious in a literal garbage pen—”

But I don’t care. The back way is Quinton’s—was Quinton’s—is—was—

—Is my favorite way. I kick at a rock, but it doesn’t go as far as I want, so I kick it again. It skitters off the road into a gutter. Fine.

The rain isn’t letting up like I’d hoped it would. Drops fall small and fast and everywhere. I tug at my hood, pulling it lower, over my eyes. I don’t really need to see to get where I’m going. It’s just a formality at this point.

Still, for Risa’s sake, I’m careful making my way down the hill. Off to the side, tucked away in their own flat nook, are a pair of dumpsters. I hop onto mine—the left one—pulling myself on top of the wall, slowly lowering myself down on the other side into the Circle.

A tram slowly circles the bullseye of shops in the center. It passes and I run across the tracks to a skinny alley on the Circle’s edge. The fire escape on the side of the old hotel groans in protest as I climb. I pull myself up onto the roof, clamber across, drop two feet down onto the lower roof of the clock tower.

One time, I’d climbed up to the higher roof above the clock face, up where the bells were. Quinton had called me an idiot, but he’d been laughing too. Today I sit where we normally did, on the edge of the roof, in the hollow space between the columns that support the clockworks and bells.

I can’t see the sun set through the clouds, so I look down at the Circle through the rain, watching the streetlights along its circumference blink to life, one by one, on their automatic timers. The streetlights, the lights in the windows of the still-open shops, the running lights along the bottom of the trams—they’re all so bright in the dark. Too bright. I look away.

I lean back until I’m lying flat against the roof, hands beneath my head, feet dangling over the edge. My mind wanders, and I let myself remember.

“If we ever get to leave—” I had said.

“—When.”

“When we ever get to leave, where would you go?”

Quinton stared me dead in the eye. “The Moon.”

“The Moon? You some kind of astronaut or something?”

He flashed a sideways grin. “Nah, man. I just got a score to settle with it.”

“With the Moon. Course you do.”

“Oh yeah, and a big one, too. The Moon’s a liar. Making all sorts of promises it can’t keep.” He spun a bottle cap around his finger. “You think if you do it a favor, it’ll help you, but it doesn’t. The Moon doesn’t care. It’ll forget all about you. Never listen to the Moon.”

“Let’s hope you get up there to teach it a lesson, then. We can’t just let it get away with something like that.”

Quinton flicked the cap down into the Circle. “Where will you go?”

“I dunno.” I lay back, feet swinging in the open air. “Since you’re taking the Moon, maybe I’ll take the stars.”

“All of them, huh? That’s an awful lot for a runt like you.”

“Who’re you calling a runt?” I sat up and shoved him.

He shoved me back. “Hey, Jesse,” he said, gesturing at the twilight sky, “I bet you don’t know why the sun sets red.”

“What is this, a pop quiz?” I glanced at Quinton, but he wasn’t smiling like he normally was when he was joking. “All I know is that you can’t see the Moon or the stars while it’s out, and then how’re we supposed to get anywhere?”

He had laughed. “True enough.”

The sound of rain tapers off and I sit up. I’ve wasted enough time. I need to head back. Risa’s waiting.

Once I’m back down in the Circle, I wait for a tram to pass by and hop onto the open back. It’s wet, but it beats walking all the way to the house.

The long way isn’t as exciting as the back way, but it can be fun to look at all the houses in the neighborhoods outside the Circle. They’re stacked on top of each other, squished together, with no room in between. Just rows upon rows of the same row houses. There’s no one out, no light shining out the windows, only wet bricks and red doors shut against the night. The only sounds I hear are the humming of the tram on the tracks and my own breathing.

Right as the tram loops back to return to the Circle, I hop off. Suddenly, I’m left with just my own footsteps echoing off the walls as I walk the rest of the way back.

The storm has washed the sidewalks clean. It smells like wet concrete and shallow city puddles. I adjust my hood, leaving it up even though the rain has stopped.

I hate how dead it all seems. It never felt this dead before.

Screw this city. Screw this city and its back ways and its silence and its street-

lights that drown out the stars and screw Quinton.

My hands clench into fists. Do I really mean that?

Do I really care?

I stop outside the house, our own shut-doored house, and look up at the sky. It looks so empty without the clouds, without the Moon. All the streetlights make the sky glow purple like a bruise. A giant, all-encompassing bruise.

My hood slips back as I stare up and I see it.

I laugh. I just stand there, laughing.

The door slams and Risa is next to me. “Are you okay?”

I point. “Look.”

She looks up, trying to follow my gaze.

“The Moon,” I say.

“Jesse, it’s a new moon tonight.”

“I know. But that’s where it is. That’s where it should be. Don’t you see? Right there.” She takes my hand and gently lowers it. I look at her. She’s looking at me, brows furrowed, eyes shining.

“It’s okay,” she says softly. “Come back inside.”

I look down at my hand, tightly enfolded in hers. “What if I forget? What if I…”

She shakes her head. “You won’t forget.” She squeezes my hand, and I let her lead me

back home.

She’s lying, and she knows I know it. But I let it be true for tonight.



A Small Child

Emily Bontrager

A small child,
arms outstretched, balanced
on the painted line.

Talk About It

Abbey Harmon

Peach Pit

Brianna Clark

1.

Small town, track home,
a stone's throw away from the ghetto,
but still among the gringos,
rows of roses to line the lawn
and a gravenstine cornered by the fence,
but they wanted something sweeter.
Perhaps a peach tree.

2.

Before it even produced fruit,
it provided shelter
for the mewling kitten
left stranded in the rain.
They engraved the name 'Peaches'
into her nametag
and the tree bloomed its first blossom
the next summer.

3.

She was too short to climb
the trees her brothers scaled:
the cork tree at the park,
the oak tree at their neighbor's,
the cherry-plum out back,
the chestnut tree on the street corner,
but the peach tree, with its branches
low and sturdy, offered her
a place to perch.

4.

When the house next door caught fire,
it scarred, singed, seared
the peach tree in their front yard.
The blossoms never fell that summer
and they waited two years for
the next harvest to come, but when it did
the branches were breaking with the weight.

5.

After childhood was tucked into bed,
she buried Peaches under her tree
and the weight of the makeshift
casket being lowered into the dirt
nearly broke her.

6.

Big city, apartment complex,
a stone's throw from downtown,
but still among the financially indebted,
she escaped the dead lawn and wilting roses,
and had no space for a gravenstine,
but she planted the sapling pit
of a homegrown peach in the pot
on her windowsill, not yet a tree--
only the memory of sweetness.

Kindra Sophia Soto

Wittenberg



Tori Tateishi

Take Me Home

Salton

Brendon Sylvester

A barren seashore,
 strewn with salt-bleached fishbones,
 beside a town as silent as Gomorrah,
 whose murmuring shadows fade
 and turn themselves stone.
 Rank flesh falls from our bones.
 The shore grows hotter
 as selves burn flesh to selves: a godless Torah.
 Who chooses Hell cannot from Hell deliver.

A stranger comes.
 He clothes this outcast daughter.
 A voice says "Son of man, come see this river.
 The fresh into the salt flows to restore us."

Behold, I pour my Spirit out like water.
 Come from the winds, O breath.
 Make breathe these dry bones,
 for from the East returns the thundering aura. You
 watered sands,
 bear fruit.
 For all the earth groans.



Tori Tateishi — *untitled*

Lazarus

—
Brutus

“And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth.’ And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

Tell me Lazarus

What was it like to pass from life, to cross the final threshold of earth's journey and to make right a half century of weary despair? Did you let go of life freely or did you treasure it like the last bits of summer snow percolating down the mountainside, the world waiting psychotically until your wrists were limp and lifeless? What did you find on the other side? An Elysian field of patriarchs must have awaited you, stretched out like the arms of a loving God, for which a rapturous, earthly sunrise was but a peek through a keyhole into a world which should have been.

Tell me Lazarus

What was it like to return; to dry the swamp of hasty tears which stained your fellow pilgrims' face? They couldn't know the joys you knew, their shoulders slumped with weary cares; you oblivious to the jars of pennies and tears stacked to heights they thought rivaled heaven. Your clammy corpse gulped in vital air. You stood up, called to live this life again, a weary witness to a withered world. At your resurrection, life was not so much a boon to be enjoyed as a sentence to be completed, having given all your strength and patience to the hope of rest early ternal.

Tell me Lazarus

What was it like to be recalled? How could you fall from heaven high like a summer bolt of lightning after your soul resolved to shake the dust and spider webs off this porcelain world and enter in the halls of gold. The Jews heard you were raised, yet you, plucked from the echelons of angels, must have felt you were raised to death. What life is there among the crags and arrows of a world at war- a war begun in Eden and revitalized in Rome? To travel through a weary world with a passport marked for higher things. To be born is a such a joyous day, but . . . to return?

The Parting Glass

Brian Brooks

Armstrong Station is located about fifty miles past the end of the Ross Ice Shelf and about four hundred miles from Amundsen-Scott Station at the South Pole. Landlocked by mountains of permafrost and snow, air transportation is the only way of getting in or out of the base. During the dark months, penetrating the continent is impossible, so anyone who finds themselves down south after the winter solstice will have to make living arrangements for several months of darkness and isolation.

There are some who choose willingly to be stranded. I signed on for a year-long stint in the middle of the continent, part of a small group of staff who were paid meager wages to cook, clean, and provide medical care to the researchers who called the base home. Tonight would be the one-year-anniversary of that year-long commitment, and we were expecting the salvation of a charter flight that could brave the frigid temperatures of the far South and take us to Puntas Arenas—a Chilean outpost on the Tierra del Fuego. From there, we'd fly commercial to the States with a layover in Lima.

In the meantime, it was my job to keep the runway clear. Although it rarely snowed at the station, the winds that howled across the tundra jostled mountains of powder over the stretch of land that some presumptuous human had arbitrarily marked off as a runway. I stood, haunched over the snowpiles, surrounded in a cloud of my own breath. The horizontal sun, finally show-

ing its face after three months of darkness, ricocheted off the shimmering virgin snow and nearly blinded me as I'd forgotten to grab the red sunglasses that hung on a nail over my bed. I considered returning to the bunker but decided against it. In order to cross the threshold of the bunker, I'd have to strip to my long johns and go through the process of redressing, which had all the tediousness of putting the stripped layers of an onion back together.

“Hey Jake!”

I turned around when I heard my name. Walking with his head protectively buried in a scarf, my friend Errol braved the raw elements of nature to address me. He was on the shorter side, and his almond-colored skin was wrapped in about five layers of synthetic fluff.

“Chip and Issy found another box of booze in the the boiler room. We thought we'd crack it open for our last night.”

I laughed, “I'm surprised any of the booze made it to the last day!” I remembered the rationing all five of us had agreed upon that fateful day last year when the only supplies we'd be getting for the next six months showed up on a particularly frosty runway. Chip, with all his foresight as the station doctor, had divided the bourbon, beer, and gin into weekly portions. Claire, the camp epicure, had broken into the stash a few times, but Chip had solved this problem by hiding the rest of the alcohol in the boiler room, a place she'd never think to check.

“I'll be inside in a few minutes.” I said, “Just gotta finish the runway.”

“Thanks for doing that. We'll have an extra pint for you when you're done!” He gave me a friendly pat on the back, but through all the layers of clothing it lacked the affection he intended for it. As he lowered his head to the frozen ground to protect himself from the frosty winds, he slipped out of sight and I heard the heavy metal door to the bunker being opened and closed.

With a grunt of pure manpower, I pushed the tin shovel into the side of the snowpile. The tightly-packed snow repulsed me and shuttered my tense body. Finally, I managed to heave a pile of snow to the side. A few heavy shovelfuls later and I could make out a long, icy runway totally cleared of

snow. I took off my thick gloves and rubbed my bare palms together, generating precious warmth. Reaching into my back pocket, I grabbed a flair and struck a match which I was careful to guard from the whooping wind with a protective hand. At their combustible union, the flair jumped to life and began spewing sparks in every direction. I threw it onto the frozen concrete and turned to the bunker.

A dozen yards away, a tin shack with walls not even the weather could penetrate stood indomitably in the arctic wind. It was an object of function, not of beauty, though what it symbolized—warmth, life, companionship—was its own strange beauty. Trudging through the snow, I put on my glove to open the heavy door. I had learned to put my gloves on after I froze my thumb and three fingers to the door handle and lost a few layers of skin.

The hot, damp air hit me like a wall. Contrasting with the utilitarian design of the building exterior, the inside of the building at least attempted to appear like a home. It would have been unfair to expect from this space the paintings, flowers, and windows of suburban domesticity, so a purposeful choice was made to decorate the room like a lumberjack's cabin.

Dark oak panelling made the space feel comfortably claustrophobic. The dim single light bulb that radiated its glow meekly around the room illuminated a small collection of wall-mounted animal heads, most of which were not native to the continent.

Crouched around a moaning radiator, a group of red-nosed people with whom I had become well-acquainted were playing a game of cards. They had unfolded a cheap table and were pinning it to the earth with their pointy elbows. Without looking up from the game, Errol pulled out a seat for me. I sat down and reached for a bottle.

“What are you playing?” I asked, pouring some gin into a plastic glass.

“We thought we'd start with blackjack,” Chip said. He had his flanneled arm around Izzy's shoulder and she nestled against him, her whole body at an angle.

“Well, deal me in!” I said.

Izzy handed me one face-down card and another one face-up.

“How was the sun?” Errol said, “It's been a long time.”

“I forgot what it looked like.” I said. “I guess it waited until now to promise a healthy sleep cycle. Too bad we leave in an hour!”

Errol nodded. “Muslims pray five times a day, but it's hard to remember to do it when daylight is nowhere to be found. I sort of got out of the habit while I was over here!”

Chip glanced up from the table, “I didn't know you were Muslim, Errol. Aren't you guys not supposed to drink?”

Errol laughed and swallowed the last of his bourbon, “Yeah. My parents would be pissed if they found out.” I watched Errol compulsively refill his glass. Noticing my gaze, he added, “I'll probably go dry once I get back to Michigan. That way, my parents won't worry.”

He put the bourbon to his lips and downed half of it before setting it down.

“I don't know what I'd do if I couldn't drink,” Claire exclaimed. She was a precocious girl—by far the youngest in the group—and was already three or four glasses into the evening. But she drank with such confidence and playfulness that no one could bring themselves to cut her off.

Izzy sat up to collect the cards. Everyone had busted, giving Errol, who had the atrocious sum of sixteen, a grand total of two dollars and forty-five cents. He collected the nickels and quarters while Izzy shuffled the cards with her long, painted fingernails.

“Did you remember the flair, Jake?” she asked me. Her thick Chilean accent pushed and pulled the vowels in that sentence in beautiful ways.

I nodded, “We'll probably need to wave it down when it gets here. Let's try to listen for the engine.”

Izzy passed a single card facedown to every person at the table. When

she got to Chip, she playfully taunted him with his card and then kissed him on the nose.

“Oh, get a room!” Claire groaned.

“That’s the plan.” Chip said, looking at the group, “We’re getting married!”

The whole group expressed a mixture of shock and delight. “Congratulations!” I exclaimed. For months I thought they were just hooking up like everyone else. I laughed to myself. Love is usually the last thing you admit, especially if your goal for the past year has been to have fun.

The cards now on the table, we began to calculate our options. I had a seven of diamonds and a eight of hearts,

“Hit me,” I said. Izzy added a meager three of spades to my pile.

“Where are you going to live?” Errol asked.

“Omaha,” Izzie said, “We’re going to live with Chip’s parents”

“That sounds like a lot of paperwork,” Claire said, “One of my best friends married a guy from Germany. Took them three years before they let him live in the States.”

Izzy wrinkled her nose and added a card to her deck, “I don’t think that’ll happen to us. I have my--how do you say--pasaporte?”

“I think you’ll need a Visa or something,” Claire said, downing the rest of her gin. Chip shrugged, “We’ll figure it out.”

“Congratulations you guys!” I exclaimed, still reeling from the excitement. “Do yourselves a favor and get hitched before Christmas. Long engagements are a bear!”

Chip laughed, “What do you know about marriage?”

“He’s practically a monk!” Errol said. I had a reputation as the “virgin” of the group, meaning that I was the only one who wasn’t constantly bed-hopping.

“I was married once.” I said.

“You were married?” Errol asked flabbergasted. Everyone in the group stared at me in disbelief. Everyone but Claire.

“What happened?” Claire blubbered, “Did she leave you?” By the time she finished, she was rolling in her chair with laughter, the booze having convinced her that my singleness was humorous.

“She died.”

“Oh.” Claire stopped laughing and slumped in her chair.

“It all happened in, like, a week,” I said, “I didn’t even go to her funeral.”

“Why not?” she asked, looking up from her drink.

“Her parents didn’t want me to to. So I came here instead.”

Everyone was silent for what seemed like several minutes and I felt a pang of guilt at having brought down the mood of the conversation.

“How have we never talked about this stuff before?” Errol asked.

“Here I am thinking you guys are so boring!” Claire droned. She pronounced the word “boring” with emphasis and length, putting the whole force of her body into a forward flop against the table that she used as an excuse to get another drink.

“Sorry about your wife, man,” Errol said quietly.

I exhaled loudly but didn’t say anything. To my right, Claire had her face buried in her new glass of gin. Her shoulders were heaving up and down and I could tell she was sobbing.

“It’s fine!” I said, putting a hand on her shoulder. “You don’t have to feel bad. Everyone says stupid things when they’re drunk.”

“It’s not that,” she said. Her neck craned up and her face was red with tears. “It’s this whole stupid continent that’s making us leave and go back to where

we came from. I can't go back. Not after everything that—" She stopped. I squeezed her shoulder affectionately. She was very drunk, but somehow what she said made sense. I heard the howling of the Arctic breeze flowing through a land where the sun was setting. I thought about how I would do anything to keep from going out into that weather, the icy wind pounding through our jackets. All I wanted was to stay in this panelled palace, this womb of warmth and safety,

"The plane will be here in half-an-hour," Chip said curtly. "We should get outside to stand watch."

"Oh not yet Chip!" Izzy exclaimed, "Let's have one more drink. A Parting Glass!" She was remembering the old Scottish ballad a crusty pilot from the Highlands had taught us on our first night in the Arctic. It was the first song she'd learned in English. Chip smiled half-heartedly and reached for the last gin bottle, already half gone. He poured five portions and passed them around.

"One more Parting Glass!" he said.

Everyone lifted their glasses high—even Claire who could hardly stand. This was the Parting Glass, the drink we all knew was coming. Between us and the frozen world was one swig of gin. One Parting Glass before we slipped on our caps, mittens, jackets, galoshes, and everything else that would protect us from the weather outside.

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